

MANHUNT

WORLD'S MOST POPULAR CRIME-FICTION MAGAZINE

DON LOWRY

GLENN CANARY

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JUNE, 1963

35 CENTS

every story NEW!

VOL. 11, NO. 3

MANHUNT

JUNE, 1963

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MANHUNT VOLUME 11, NUMBER 3, June 1963. Single copies 35 cents. Subscriptions, \$4.00 or 12 issues in the United States and Possessions; elsewhere \$5.00 (in U.S. Funds) for 12 issues. Published bi-monthly by Flying Eagle Publications, Inc., 545 Fifth Avenue, New York 17, N. Y. Telephone MU 7-6623. Second Class Postage paid at New York, N. Y. and at additional mailing offices. The entire contents of this issue are copyright 1963 by Flying Eagle Publications, Inc., under the International Copyright Convention. All rights reserved under Inter-American Copyright Convention. Title registered U.S. Pat. Office. Reproduction or use without express permission of editorial or pictorial content in any manner is prohibited. Postage must accompany manuscripts and drawings if return is desired, but no responsibility will be assumed for unsolicited materials. Manuscripts and art work should be sent to Manhunt, 545 Fifth Avenue, New York 17, N. Y. No similarity between any of the names, characters, persons and or institutions appearing in this magazine and those of any living or dead person or institution is intended and any similarity which may exist is purely coincidental. Printed in U. S. A.

*"You want to catch him pretty bad, don't you?" Ernie said.
"I'll kill the son of a bitch, I get him back in my jail."*

NO ESCAPE

BY GLENN CANARY

ERNIE turned off the engine of his car and got out. The wind was blowing hard, cold, and the snow felt fine and wet against his face. He walked to the police car.

The policeman had the door of his car open and the motor was running. He was standing outside, watching the road, but the heat from the car kept him from being too cold. He was a big man, about fifty years old, and there were gold stars on the sleeve of his uniform. He had his coat pulled back on one side so that his gun was free in case he needed it.

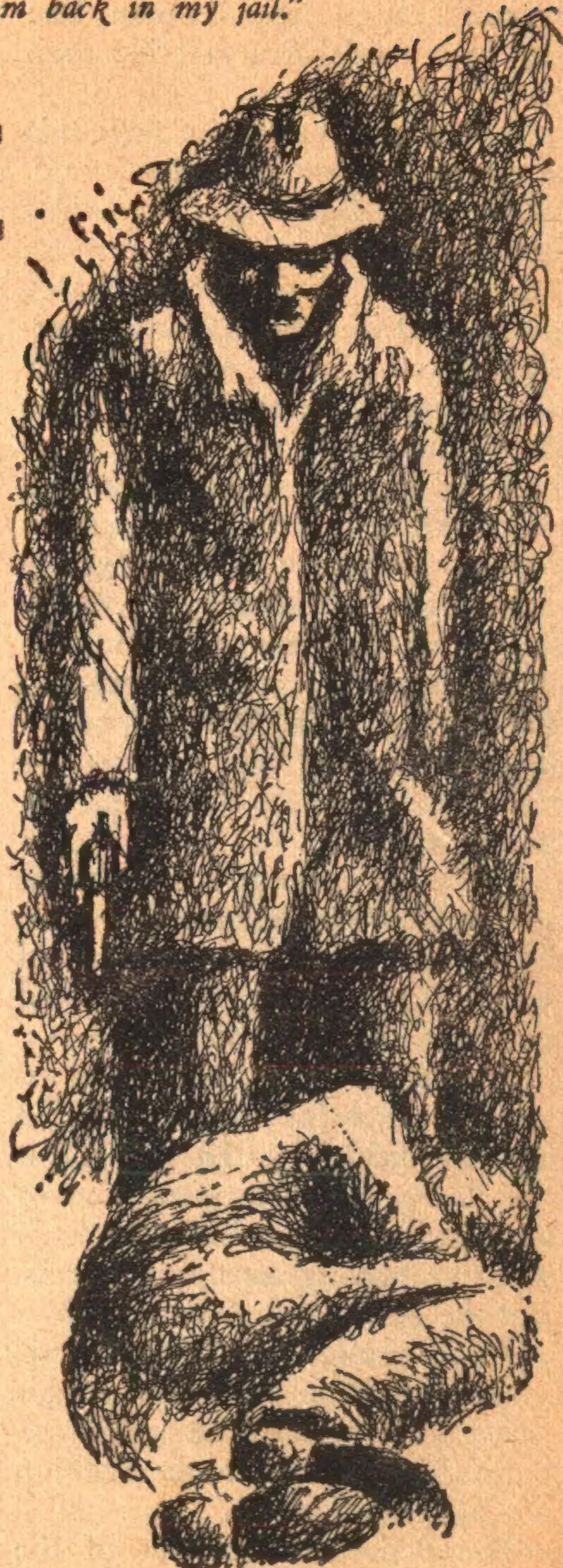
"You got a line on Barton yet?" Ernie asked.

"No," the policeman said, "But they'll get him. He's hurt and he can't stay out long on a night like this." He looked at Ernie then. "Who're you?"

Ernie told him his name. "I'm with the paper," he said. "They sent me down to see what's happening."

"Hell of a night for it."

Ernie nodded, but he did not say



anything. He did not know what he could say to the policeman. The big man made him feel inexperienced and young.

"You should have been there this afternoon," the policeman said. "You never heard so many rifles going off all at once."

Ernie had heard about it. A hunter had seen the man in a three-sided lean-to in the woods outside Evansburg and he had slipped away and called the police. They had had to come at him from the north and he saw them coming and began running up the hill, away from them. Apparently, one of the bullets hit him because he had suddenly flipped into a somersault into the snow. But he had jumped up immediately and kept running. By the time they got up the hill he was gone.

The radio in the police car began to crackle. The policeman got in and closed the door. Ernie could see his lips moving, but he could not hear what was being said.

The wind blew up swirls of snow around his legs. He had a revolver tucked into his belt and it felt heavy. It embarrassed him to be carrying a gun. He thought it was like playing cops and robbers. But the editor had given it to him and told him to carry it just in case.

He turned up the collar on his jacket. He wished he could go home. He did not think anything would really happen.

The policeman got out of the

car. "They think they've got him pinned in at the feed mill," he said. "You want a story, you better get down there."

Ernie asked him how to find the mill and the policeman told him. Ernie thought the other man looked disappointed that he had to stay at the crossroads to make sure Barton did not simply walk out of town when no one was looking.

Ernie got into his car and drove to the feed mill. The car's heater was not working properly and it was not much warmer in the car than it was outside.

A gust of wind hit the car's side and made it shake.

Ernie thought about the man they were hunting. His name was Eddie Barton and he was thirty-two years old. He was wanted in Ohio for armed robbery and also in Pennsylvania and Virginia. He had been caught robbing a gas station near Evansburg and had been put in jail until he could be arraigned, but three days ago, on a Sunday morning, he tricked the turnkey into opening the cell. He slugged the old man and escaped. Probably he would not have gotten away, but there was a fog that morning.

At first everyone thought he had hitched a ride and had left the area, but now they knew he had not. And he had been seen in Evansburg only about an hour ago. He had been chased from a gas station. He was trying to steal a jacket, but he ran when he was seen.

Ernie had seen a picture of Barton. He was thin and had dark hair and in the photograph he had needed a shave. He was scowling and he looked mean.

He pulled his car behind a police cruiser and got out. The wind seemed to be blowing harder. He shivered. God, he thought, God. Looking toward the feed mill, he could see a group of men with flashlights. He could see the misty snow when he looked at the lights.

He thought about his own gun when he saw the rifles the men were carrying. He was glad he had thought to only put five cartridges in the revolver. He had the cylinder fixed so that the first time he pulled the trigger, the pin would fall on an empty chamber.

He found the sheriff and told him who he was. The sheriff was carrying a rifle and he also was wearing a pistol and belt around his waist.

"You think he's in there?" Ernie said.

"We found tracks going in," the sheriff said, "and we can't find any coming out."

"Did anyone go in after him yet?"

"Not yet. We're waiting for a key."

"How did he get in if you need a key?"

"Through that storage bin there. There's a hole in the back of it and he could crawl through there. We'll wait till we can go in the front."

"Does he have a gun?"

"I don't know." The sheriff laughed and raised his rifle. "It don't much matter. I'm assuming he does. When he sees me, he better get his hands up faster than anyone ever moved before or he's a dead man." He laughed again.

Ernie walked over to the storage bin and squatted down to look in it. He could see the hole the man had crawled through.

He stood up. The sheriff looked at him. "Boy it's cold," Ernie said.

"The bastard would pick a night like this," the sheriff said.

"If he's outside without any coat, it's enough to make you sorry for him."

"I don't feel sorry for him. Nobody made him pull those robberies."

"It's too cold even to hunt an animal tonight, though," Ernie said.

"He's worse than an animal," the sheriff said.

A man touched the sheriff's shoulder. "Old Ed's here with the key," he said.

The sheriff walked around to the front of the building. Ernie followed him. Two uniformed deputies stayed beside the feed bin so Barton could not get out that way when he heard the men come in the front.

Ernie waited until the other men had gone into the building. He was wearing a fleece-lined leather jacket, but he could not stop shivering in the cold. The snow was fine and

wet, almost like rain. Little drops of water were running down the back of his neck.

One of the two deputies who had stayed behind came around and went into the building. Ernie followed him in.

They had turned on the lights in the building. It was warm inside. He took a deep breath and shuddered. His ears were burning.

The sheriff came back to the front. "We found where he went out the back," he said. "Come on."

The men gathered behind the feed mill. There were no tracks, but it had been snowing hard. The sheriff told Ernie they knew Barton had come out this way because there was blood on the floor beside the small back door.

He shined his flashlight across the field that was in back of the mill.

"He must have gone over that way," he said, "toward the creek and the railroad."

"You think he could cross that creek?" one of the deputies asked the sheriff.

"I hope he tried it. He's going to have pneumonia in the morning if he did. That water's five feet deep out there." He looked around. "Everyone all here? Let's go then."

Ernie walked beside the sheriff as they started into the field. It was dark and they could not see anything except where the lights were shining.

His feet were wooden with cold

and his face burned. The wind was coming in gusts and he kept shivering. The gun in his belt was cutting him and he wished he could take it out and carry it in his hand, but he did not want to walk with these men and carry a gun. He thought they would laugh at him if they knew he was carrying a pistol just as if he were a big time reporter in the movies.

He wondered what he would do if he should suddenly run face-on into Barton and Barton had a gun.

God, it was cold. It hurt to breathe. He thought about Barton who did not even have a coat.

He looked up at the sky. Most of the sky was black, but in the part where the moon was, the clouds were silver and shining. He could see the clouds moving up there and it made him colder to watch them.

"What's over this way?" he asked the sheriff.

"Creek and a railroad track."

"I mean besides them. Any houses or anything where he could hide?"

"Not without crossing the creek." The sheriff was breathing hard.

"You want to catch him pretty bad, don't you?" Ernie said.

"I'll kill the son of a bitch, I get him back in my jail."

He wondered why the sheriff hated the man so much. It did not seem necessary for the sheriff to hate Barton to want to recapture him.

He wanted to keep his mind off the cold. He tried to think of what he would say in the story he would write for the newspaper.

Barton must feel like an animal, he thought, being chased in the night and not even being allowed the help of warm clothing.

He wondered if Barton had a gun.

The sheriff stepped on a stone and twisted his ankle. He lurched heavily and swore. He stopped and kneeled to rub his leg. Ernie turned and saw that the men behind them had stopped, too.

He looked back up into the darkness in the direction they were facing, toward the creek and the railroad tracks, but he could not see more than just a few feet ahead.

He wondered what Barton was thinking. They had lights burning and if Barton was up there ahead of them, he could see them. They probably appeared misty and ghostly to him in the snow, but he could see them coming after him. How did he feel, cold, probably lying on his stomach on the wet earth? Defiant? Scared? Welcoming?

Why would he welcome them? Ernie felt a twist of pity for the man, but he felt excitement for the man, too. He thought Barton must feel good, too, only that did not make sense. Why should he feel defiant and proud to lie there in darkness and wait for his death? Because he had chosen not to live as other men?

Ernie wrapped his arms around himself, trying to get some warmth.

Damn it, he thought, I could kill *him* myself. Then he wondered why he thought that. He did not even know Barton and the man had never done anything to harm him. But there was anger in him, only when he tried to examine it to see why he hated Barton the way the sheriff did, it faded away and he was only cold again and puzzled.

He was suddenly anxious to get on with this thing. He wanted to see Barton, to see whether there really was anything they shared to explain this feeling he had for the man. He could almost project himself into the body that lay somewhere up there and he could almost see the hunters as they must have looked to Barton. And he did not want this sheriff to get Barton, he wanted to help Barton get away.

The sheriff's rifle lay in the snow beside him. He was rubbing his leg, panting.

"Maybe you ought to go back," Ernie said.

"Not till we get Barton. That's what I came out here for and I'm not going back till I get him."

Ernie did not know what to say. He jammed his hands into his pockets and tried to pull his head down into his jacket. His legs were stiff and the wool in his pants scratched his skin and felt cold.

"I tell you what to put in your story," the sheriff said. He stood up. "You tell the people I said Bar-

ton is the most vicious man I ever saw."

"He's got to be tough to stay out here," Ernie said.

"I didn't say he was tough. He's not so damn tough. He's just mean." The sheriff laughed and turned to see where the other men were. "I'll take some of that meanness out of him when we get him back."

He turned to Ernie then. "You know what I did with the last guy who escaped from my jail. I broke out the glass in his cell window and made him sleep naked on the floor for two days and it was January. He wasn't nearly so tough when I got finished with that. Barton'll soften, too." He looked ahead into the darkness and hunched his shoulders against the snow. "Cold," he said.

They started walking again. The sheriff was carrying his rifle at the ready. They were close enough now that Ernie could see the railroad tracks ahead of them.

He could not think of anything he could do to help Barton, but he did hate this big man who walked beside him with a rifle. What right did this man who was warm have to hate the small man who was cold?

But Ernie thought he would rather be Barton than the sheriff.

The first shot sounded like a firecracker going off. Ernie knew what it was, it was the noise of a .22 rifle, but he had never heard a gun

fired at men before and he did not know what to do. He could hear yelling. The sheriff had snapped off his light and had dived to the ground.

There was a second shot and Ernie threw himself forward onto his stomach. The snow made him feel wet right away and the ground was soft. He wondered if he would have a cold in the morning. The way he was lying, his gun hurt him, and he rolled over on his side and took the revolver out of his belt.

The men had all begun firing, but not one had seen any fire flashes and they only knew Barton was somewhere out there in front of them.

The sound of the gunfire built up and Ernie felt excited. He held his pistol and crawled toward the sheriff.

"Barton," the sheriff yelled, "come on out."

There was another shot. Ernie saw the flash, but he did not say anything to the sheriff.

The sheriff had seen the lights, too. Lying flat on his stomach, he fired three rounds in that direction. "I wish to God I could see him," he said. "How the hell can I hit him when I can't even see him."

"He's behind the railroad tracks," Ernie said. "You can't hit him while he's back there."

The sheriff did not answer him. He fired again toward the place where he had seen the rifle flash.

"Barton," someone else yelled, "You've had it, Barton."

"Go away."

Ernie was surprised at the sound of the man's voice. It was high and thin, shrill.

A train whistle blew.

"Damn," the sheriff said. "He'll get away when that train passes."

"Can he get on it?"

"He better not try. It comes through here at fifty miles an hour. It'll jerk his arm off if he grabs for it."

"I'd try it though," Ernie said. "It's better than getting shot."

He could see a glow in the distance where the train was.

"Maybe he won't be able to get through the creek," the sheriff said. "He might still be there when the train passes." He rolled away to talk to another man.

Ernie lay on his side and watched the glow from the train come closer. It was going to come to where Barton was first and he thought Barton would try for it.

He thought about Barton getting on the train and riding out, laughing at them.

He got up and began to run toward the tracks. He heard the sheriff yell, but he did not stop. He expected Barton to fire at him, but he crossed the tracks and threw himself into a clump of weeds and no one had shot at him.

He sat up. He was still holding his gun. He looked around wildly, half expecting Barton to be there.

The train was closer. He could see the headlight and he could hear the engine. The whistle blew again.

He saw a man running toward him along the tracks. The man was watching the train, judging its speed, and Ernie knew it was Barton and that he was going to try for the train.

The train caught up to the man and began to pass him. Ernie could hear gunfire, but he did not pay any attention to it. He was watching Barton run. The man had his head down, running hard, and when the train's first few cars had passed him, he caught a rail on the side of a car and swung up. Ernie thought he was going to fall, but he twisted suddenly and was riding solidly on the car.

Ernie aimed his pistol and fired four times. He thought he missed the first two times, but the third and fourth slugs hit Barton. He jerked and sprang away from the train as if he had jumped clear.

When the dead man hit the ground, he did not roll. He lay still, crumpled sideways the way a baby will lie when he is sleeping in a crib.

Ernie was standing beside the body, looking at it, when the sheriff and the other men ran up. He did not hear what they said at first, but the sheriff slapped him on the shoulder and said, "Man, that was great," and Ernie heard that.

Ernie did not say anything. One

of the other men said, "Jesus, did you see the way he shot him off that train?"

Ernie thought, now they will make up stories and everyone will say they saw it, but no one could have seen it. They were all on the other side of the train. This was between Barton and me.

"I didn't know where the hell you were going when you took off," the sheriff said. "Boy, you got more guts than good sense."

"What some reporters will do for a story," a deputy laughed.

Ernie wondered how Barton could have thought he had the right to be free. He said it aloud. "I don't know why he thought he could be free." But the anger was gone. It had come quickly and had made him shoot, but now it was gone. He did not think anyone else would ever know, but he knew that he had murdered a man.

One of the men rolled the body over. Barton's shirt had come open and Ernie could see his naked chest. He wished he had a blanket to cover him.



Deadly Cuckold

It made Big Joe proud and happy to see the way his wife mothered the boy . . .

BY F. S. LANDSTREET



it?" Joe roared down at him. Two quick steps brought the big ranch foremen to the controls of the self-propelled combine and he reached out and snapped the switch off,

Harry Sellers was getting up when Joe turned back to him. Taking off his baseball cap, his eyes darting to Joe intently, as if he didn't know whether to laugh or run, he waited. His young, cheerful pug-dog face was as poised as a deer: Joe knew that at the first hint, that face would either break into a smile or into an expression of earnest apology.

"How many times I got to tell you? Turn off the engine when you work on the runnin' parts of a machine!" Joe demanded.

Harry ducked his head, and his white-blond crew-cut shone in the hot Kansas sun. "Gee, I'm sorry, Mr. Dunlap—"

"Don't sorry me!" Joe had a hard time staying mad at this kid, and that made him mad. "You're not cutting off any of *my* fingers!"

"Well, it's been giving trouble cranking when it's hot, and I thought I could put a new tooth in without . . ." the boy trailed off, looking around him as if he expected a crowd of bystanders to support his words. He spotted Bate Harper just climbing out of the pickup, and waved his cap. "Hi, Bate,"

Joe seethed. "You thought—" Then he caught himself and stopped. He looked again at Harry

Sellers, remembering why he'd come out here, at the lean, smooth-muscled shoulders and chest and open, clear face of the 19-year old boy. *This is what gets her*, he thought, and the heat went out of him, giving way to cold, heavy sureness.

He turned to Bate Harper. "Finish that blade," he said, seeing that the kid had the iron under the rivet just right and the ball-peen hammer in the wheat stubble where he'd dropped it. "And then go ahead with it." He turned to Harry Sellers. "Get your shirt and come with me, boy."

He never called Harry Sellers anything but "boy" when they were working, though he had long since been calling him "Harry" at home. And yet it galled him when Harry still called him "Mr. Dunlap" instead of "Joe" like the rest of them did.

"I was going pretty good, till that blade broke," Harry said as Joe spun the pickup and headed back toward the buildings. He sounded anxious, as if he thought Joe had put Bate on the combine because he'd been doing poor work.

"Yeah, boy, I know," Joe said. "But I figure you know a combine pretty good now. Thought I'd learn —teach—you a little about the elevators." He felt the red creeping up around his ears at that slip. Four days ago he wouldn't have thought a thing about it—now, he bet the little sonofabitch was grinning. He

clenched his teeth and stared hard at the approaching gate, hot joy surging over him. The little punk would find out soon enough just how much education really counted!

"That suits me fine," Harry was saying. "That driving isn't the coolest work in the world, even at ten in the morning."

At the elevators, Joe gave Harry a quick rundown on how they worked. He was icy calm now, and he knew he sounded just as easy and normal as if this was all he was doing.

"The first trailer load's due in pretty soon—" Actually it wasn't due for an hour or more—"And when it gets here, it just backs up to this auger and the driver catches a smoke and a drink of water while it unloads him." He hit the button that should start the auger turning. Nothing happened. "What the hell?" he said. He hit it again, pushing hard several times. "Damnation! Wonder is the main switch open?"

"Might be a fuse," Harry suggested.

Joe knew it *was* a fuse, but he said "Lemme check the main switch. Sometimes it gets left open." He hurried into the shed that housed the switch and went through the motions of throwing it open and shut. "Now try it!" he called, and when Harry had pushed the button a few times he added "Guess we better check the fuses!"

He held the burnt-out fuse up in the light for both of them to inspect. "That's it, sure as hell," he said. "Well, we got plenty more over here."

The fuses, of course, turned out to be all gone. Joe had put the last three under a pile of winter underwear in his bottom drawer not thirty minutes ago.

"Damn!" he said in disgusted tones. "Damn, damn, damn!" He snapped his fingers. "I got to get a move on!" He started for his pick-up, Harry half-running to keep up with him. "If we get behind on our unloading it'll foul up the whole day's cutting! I got to get to town and get some fuses! You just step over and tell Gladys I'll be late for lunch—'bout one o'clock, I'd say." He snatched open the truck door and climbed in.

"Listen, Mr. Dunlap, let me go!" Harry put his hand on the door handle. "You can get your lunch on time, and I can get the fuses! Let me go, please!"

Joe pulled the door shut, out of the boy's hand. "This is a rush job," he said. "It's my job. Just tell Gladys I'll be late, and tell the wagon drivers. And be sure and tell her right away, so she won't burn lunch!" And he dropped it into low gear and shot away from Harry.

In the rear-view mirror he saw the boy standing there watching him bounce over the cattle-guard at the main gate. *Think it over, smart*

boy! he thought, feeling cold satisfaction run through him. *It's a good chance, ain't it? You already thought of that, with your fine education, didn't you?* He thought of Gladys opening the door and seeing Harry there. Thought of the smile, the quick back-step and "Come in, Harry!" Or would it be "Come in, darling!" And then . . . His foot tromped the accelerator to the floor. *Make a big dust!* *Make him sure of himself!* He drove grimly, fast and sure. He knew just where he would stop, just the route he would take back. Just as he knew what would be happening back there. . . .

Knowing the boy had been so good, at first. "What do you suppose that college boy does nights, over there in the bunkhouse?" Gladys had asked him a few days after Harry Sellers had started to work.

"Huh? Hell, I don't know. Talks with the rest, I guess."

"He seems like a nice kid." There had been something in her voice that was different somehow. Not like the way she'd acted before —about that big Swede last summer, for instance. Sort of, well, maybe motherly. "Why don't you invite him over? It'd be nice to hear about Philadelphia, you know?" She didn't add "Anything but this damn ranch!" but Joe had heard it so often he almost said it for her.

His first reaction was automatic. He didn't want any other men in

his house. He'd learned better. The first excuse he'd thought of was, "Well, I dunno. It'd be kind of funny, inviting him over and not the rest of 'em."

Gladys had looked at him a moment, and then her full mouth had curved into her ringing, pealing laugh. "Who, Big Joe Dunlap?" she asked. "Honey, you know you can make those field rats like anything!" When he didn't answer, she had shrugged. "Well, if you don't want to, forget it." And she had turned back to the television set. Joe had looked at her speculatively. He liked the way she'd cut her thick dark hair so it wasn't always looking messy. And she still had that terrific shape, but she didn't seem to shove it around the way she used to. And that little something in her voice—that little mother-sound. It just might be that having a nice kid like this Harry Sellers around would change her mind about children. At thirty-six, she didn't have much more time left to change her mind.

"Don't make a big deal out of it," he'd told Harry. "Just ease over after supper."

"Sure, Mr. Dunlap, thanks!"

"And—" Joe had been about to add "And for cryin' out loud don't call me Mr. Dunlap," but he stopped. If this boy called him "Joe" it might hurt whatever father-son picture Gladys might have. "See you, then," he'd finished lamely, and walked off.

Harry was a great talker. He was from a little town near Philadelphia and his father was a lawyer; and he knew things about big-city politics that Joe would have paid good money to hear. And the stories about college! The kid was a sophomore and had six more years to go to be a lawyer, and he had some great stories about all the hell-raising and the long hours they studied.

The boy was a good listener too, and he loved to hear about farming—kept Joe talking by the hour about every little detail, especially about the old days when Joe was a boy on a ranch in Montana. "The old cowboy days," Harry Sellers called them.

It had got so he'd drop over three or four nights a week, and Joe had really enjoyed those visits. He'd liked watching the kid's smart, eager face as he talked or listened, and it had tickled him the way Gladys fussed over the boy, making sure he was comfortable, and had had enough supper, and wasn't too sunburned. She even sewed on a couple of buttons for the kid, and it was like pulling teeth to get her to do it for him! He'd thought, a thousand times, *When Harry leaves, that'll be the time to suggest a baby.*

Then, three nights ago, halfway through the summer—the thought of how long he'd been a fool made him grind his teeth, made the road in front of him swim—it had hit

him like a grenade exploding in his belly.

Gladys had said she was sleepy, and had gone into the bedroom before Harry left; and then when he did leave, she had leaned out of the bedroom door with one of those filmy, low-cut gowns of hers on, to call goodnight to him. She'd looked like a picture in one of those magazines on the newstand, leaning forward so, her breasts bulging, the nipples glowing dark through the thin cloth, and the sight of her like that had aroused Joe. But despite his desire, and the good feeling that always was with him on the nights the kid visited them, somehow all the pleasure had gone out of him and he was troubled—even during their lovemaking something terrible tugged at his mind.

It had waked him up that night. A mental image of Harry Sellers' face when he looked at Gladys there in the bedroom doorway. That hot, intense, devouring look—not just admiration, or even just lust, but a sort of *intimate* lust—Joe had seen it enough in other men's faces, and he knew it beyond question.

He had realized then that that look had been on Harry's face often lately, with a little less intensity, and he had been too damn contented-dumb to see it! He remembered that Harry most always went into the kitchen with Gladys when it was time to open another beer.

That very night he had come out of the kitchen so flushed that Joe could see it through his sunburn! And he—blind with his big mother-dream, had thought they must have been laughing about something!

For the next two days Joe had gone through his duties feeling half-dazed and numb; and despite himself he couldn't stop shaking his head, insisting to himself "No, it *can't* be true!"

But two nights later—last night—Harry Sellers had come over for another visit and Joe had found out for sure that it was true. It was all there, the looks between them, Harry's hot eyes on Gladys' body as she paraded around in shorts and tight T-shirt, the too-long trips to the kitchen. All there. Joe had drunk more beer than usual, five or six cans, and had pretended to fall asleep about eleven. It was new to him, this doing nothing about it. Other times he had jumped the moment he saw what was happening, and he had never failed to send the other man away battered and bleeding. But this was a new sensation and it seemed he could not move. There was no rage in him, no fury to send him hammering at Harry Sellers. Only pain—a sick, bewildered pain.

When Harry had left, a few minutes after Joe began to feign sleep, Gladys had gone out onto the porch with him and returned with her lipstick smeared and her face

bright and flushed. Then, for some reason, the anger had started.

Joe lay awake all that night, eyes open and staring, feeling the hurt in him turn into a cold, deadly rage that almost made him shiver. And he had started building his plan. No more Big Joe the sucker! This time there would be a real payoff, not just a beating! He lay tense and icy-sure all night, planning, relishing. Now he was Smart Joe, not Big Joe!

And then to go out in the wheat field and fly off at the kid just for risking a few fingers! With a snort of self-disgust, Joe yanked the wheel, pulled the pickup into a side road, and backed around to head back. *Take it slow. No dust now.*

Near the main gate he pulled the pickup among some trees and stopped. "Look out, college lover-boy!" he muttered as he got out and took the pitchfork from the back of the truck. "Here comes Big Joe!" He checked his watch. Ten-twenty-five. Nobody would be around. Nobody. But he walked easy and casual, just in case. Keeping the main barn between himself and his house. Hurrying.

Easy. A cinch. And after—call the sheriff: "—Went off after fuses, and then remembered I had some in my house—" Moved, of course, from the bottom drawer to the kitchen. "—and there they were. . ." Then, three minutes to get the pickup, and wait for the sher-

iff. Maybe make her look at the body!

From the back of the main barn to the back of his car-shed. A quick dash up in back of the house, and he was crouching at the corner, ready. Tense and trembling now, icy with sweat, mouth open and gulping silent breaths of air—pitchfork held horizontal just above the ground, gripped so tight his knuckles were white.

He moved around the corner and to the bedroom window and crouched there listening. His heart beat so loud in his ears he was afraid he wouldn't hear. He felt dizzy and weak, and suddenly he wished he was somewhere else. Going on into town for fuses, even.

Maybe he's already told her and gone! Maybe it's not really so!

Then he heard it.

Moving, rustling. A soft, moaning sigh. "Aaah, Harry, Harry, Harry!"

Joe didn't hear his heartbeat any more. He didn't tremble, and he didn't wish anything at all. He bared his teeth unconsciously.

Another rustle, another sigh. Big Joe rose, looked briefly into the window, and then smashed in the screen with the pitchfork. "All right!" he heard himself roar. "All right!" He tore the frame of the screen from the window and thrust head and shoulders in, behind the gleaming tines of the fork. "All right!" He tasted vomit in the back of his throat.

They had frozen momentarily, standing there, but now Harry Sellers yanked himself away from Gladys and bolted for the door.

As Joe had known he would.

The kid burst through the door, jumped the four steps of the porch, and headed across the yard. He had to pause a second to open the gate in the picket fence—as Joe had known he would—and as he got it open and began his first running step, the swinging pitchfork caught him across the ankles and he sprawled through the gate.

A low growl escaped Joe as he sprang forward and drove the fork at the boy's back. He grunted with the effort of the lunge. But the boy rolled away just in time and the fork ripped his sleeve and drove into the dirt of the road.

Frantic, the boy kept rolling, but Joe yanked the pitchfork from the dry soil and in a leap was beside him again, raising the fork.

On his back now, the boy put up his hands desperately. His face was contorted and his jaw worked frenziedly, mouthing incoherent pleadings.

One sound came through to Joe, and it stayed his hand a moment. He didn't know what the boy had said—the sound came into his brain as "Daddy!"

The pitchfork stayed poised, the muscles of Big Joe's back remained bunched. He stared down at the boy with a feeling of shocked awakening. He might be this boy's

daddy! If things had been different! He had been a strong, eager kid just like him!

Joe stared at the boy in wonder. Slowly, he felt the snarling tautness erased from his face. Felt the slack of weariness pull it down as memory of his youth taught him about this boy.

Finally he lowered the fork. He glanced off into the sunwavering fields. "Beat it, boy," he said quietly, still looking off. "Beat it and don't ever let me see you again!" He turned and walked away. Might as well kill a fly for getting caught in a spider web.

Gladys was sitting on the bed. She had put on her blouse, but hadn't buttoned it, and she sat hunched over with her arms folded. Joe leaned against the bedroom door and closed his eyes. He felt drained, exhausted—he didn't want to look at her, didn't want to think.

He heard her quick intake of breath and opened his eyes to see her mouth open, her eyes widening as she shrank away. "Joe!" He followed the direction of her gaze and found that he was still holding the pitchfork.

"Joe—he forced me!" Gladys rose and darted a glance around her, like a rabbit in a corner. "He scared me, Joe! I was so glad you came! He—he was like a wild man! He grabbed me—"

"Ah, shut up." All the weariness and disgust of eighteen years' wor-

rying, fighting, listening to lies—over her—was in him. He had never felt so bone-tired, so beaten. He leaned the pitchfork against the wall just outside the bedroom door, and this reassured Gladys.

"Joe—" she took a step toward him. "Is he—did you—?"

He felt his eyes tauten involuntarily, looking at her. Something about her voice, the way she stood —something—struck a chord in Joe and he felt a sour, curdling sensation in his stomach, in his bowels. . . . From nowhere, he heard himself say: "He's dead." He watched her intently.

Gladys' eyes dilated, and her arms tightened across her breasts, one palm gripping each upper arm tight.

"Oh, Joe!" Her teeth chattered as she trailed off his name, and then she clenched her teeth so that her lower lip was thrust out. It was a reaction Joe had first seen on their honeymoon, it was her most extremely sensual expression.

Joe looked dumbly at her, tasting the paralyzing knowledge of what this was doing to her. *She loves it! She thinks I killed that kid—over her!—and she loves it!*

Mother! She's no mother, she's a Black Widow spider!

"H-hadn't you better call the sheriff?"

Yeah, she'd want them all here, to see what he'd done for her, to see what the kid had lost for her!

Big Joe stared at his wife. He

felt himself come awake slowly, surely, like a sun rising in him. Until everything was clear and sure, and the nausea and the exhaustion were gone.

"Yeah," he said. "I guess I better."

He picked up the phone book, found the number, and dialed it. "Let me speak to the sheriff," he said to the secretary who answered.

Standing in the bedroom doorway, he told the sheriff about the fuses. "—Found my wife and a—one of the farmhands, together. Uh-huh. I'm afraid I lost my head—I had a pitchfork in the truck and—well, the kid got away, but I think my wife's dead."

He hung up carefully and picked up the pitchfork, watching her expression change.



bad magic

He had been great in his day and, now, a shaking alcoholic old man, he could still put on a good act.

BY
ROBERT PAGE JONES

THERE were only two customers left in the bar and the bartender kept wiping the oak counter in front of one of them, a young guy with freckled forearms, trying to give the impression that it was time to clean up the place and go home.

The other customer was an old man who sat by himself at a table in a darkened corner of the room. He was tall and very thin and his white, unkempt hair hung over his ears and forehead. Veins like tiny blue worms crawled just below the surface of his face. He wore a very

old but elegant double-breasted blue suit and a high starched collar of the type in vogue thirty years ago.

"He don't seem to ever want to go home," the bartender said, indicating the old man.

"He's a boozer," the young man said.

"You know him?"

"Yeah."

The bartender began peeling hard-boiled eggs and dropping them into a quart jar of greenish vinegar.

"He's come in here every night



for the past three nights," the bartender said. "Doesn't talk to nobody. Just sits there until it's time to close up the place . . ."

"He's with the carni."

"The what?"

"The carnival. The road show. It's on that big lot by the stockyards on the other side of town. Ain't you been to see it?"

"No. Is it worth seein'?"

"Sure . . . if you like carnis."

"I ain't been since I was a kid."

"You should go."

"What's wrong with the old man?"

"Nothin'. He's old."

"He shouldn't drink so much."

"What do you care?" the young man said. "His money's good, ain't it?"

"Yeah. But I hate to see him spill all that good whiskey. Look how his hand shakes . . ."

"That's because he's so old."

"Are you with the carni?" the bartender said and reached the jar of eggs down underneath the bar.

"Yeah. I'm on the guying-out gang . . ."

"The what?"

"We put up the big tent."

"What about the old man?"

"Huh?"

"Is he one of them freaks?"

"No, he ain't a freak. Why do you say that?"

"He acts kind of strange."

"He's a magician."

"One of them fortune tellers?"

"No. He does tricks . . ."

"Bartender!" the old man said in a loud whisper.

"I wish he'd go home," the bartender said. "Tomorrow is Sunday and I want to get up early and watch football on the TV."

"He'll leave pretty soon," the young man said.

"Well . . . it's sure getting late."

"Bartender!" The old man rapped vigorously on the table with his glass. "Another whiskey."

"No more tonight. I've got to close up now," the bartender said.

"Aw . . . let him have one more. He's an old man."

"He should go home before he passes out," the bartender said.

The bartender took a bottle of whiskey over to where the old man was sitting and refilled his glass.

"This will have to be the last one," he said.

"I am much obliged," the old man said.

"He was a very famous magician before the booze got him," the roustabout said when the bartender got back to the bar.

"When was that?"

"Forty years ago."

"That's a long time."

"Yeah. He was really an important guy in those days. He was somethin'. He had a fancy beard and a magic show with so much stuff in it it took a couple of railroad cars to haul it around."

"I saw Blackstone once in Chicago."

"Yeah. He was like that. For one

of his tricks he made a live elephant disappear."

"I'll bet that was something."

"It was somethin' all right."

"What happened to him?"

"I told you. The booze got him."

"I've seen lots of boozers," the bartender said. "But I never seen one where something didn't happen to get him started . . ."

"It was a woman."

"His wife?"

"I think it was his wife. Anyway, he killed her."

"Jesus. You mean he murdered his wife?"

"Yeah."

"Bartender!"

By now the bartender was greatly absorbed and he went over and filled the old man's glass without protest. He took a good look at the old face. In spite of the wrinkles and the redness it was a courageous face.

"Why did he kill her?" the bartender asked when he was back behind the bar.

"She was seein' another man."

"Hell, that's no reason." The bartender cut limes and put the slices on a plate. "If I caught my old lady running around I might beat her pretty good but I wouldn't kill her . . ."

"For him it was reason enough."

"What did he do . . . shoot her?"

"No."

"What, then?"

"He cut her head off."

The bartender took the plate of limes back to the refrigerator. He spent several minutes stocking the refrigerator with beer. Then he came back to the bar and said acidly, "It's getting late. You'd better drink up."

"You think I'm kidding you about the old man, don't you," the roustabout said.

"You said it, mister, I didn't," the bartender said.

"I'm telling you he hacked her head off with an axe."

"Yeah, sure . . ."

"It's the truth."

"Then how come he's not in jail?"

"They let him go. They said it was a crime of passion. You know . . . they always say that when a guy knocks off his wife."

"He sure looks harmless enough."

"He's just old now."

"I'll bet he's sorry now he killed her," the bartender said.

"Why should he be sorry?"

"It's no good to be that old and not have a wife to go home to."

"He has a wife."

"But you said . . ."

"He got married again." The roustabout poured the last of his beer into his mouth. "He got himself one of them real pretty Southern women. She ain't a woman really, just a girl, barely out of her teens. She helps him in his magic show . . ."

"How come he's sitting here if

he's got a wife waiting in bed for him?"

"She ain't never waiting for him. She's a little tramp, that one. Believe me, I know," the roustabout said. "Not that I blame her. He must be eighty years old."

"Ain't she worried about what happened to his first wife?"

"She don't know about that."

"Why doesn't somebody tell her?"

"There ain't no reason to upset her. It was fifty years ago he killed his first wife."

"Anyway . . . he looks harmless enough."

The roustabout paid for his beer and went out. After several more minutes the old man got up and went out also. The bartender watched him. Although he was quite drunk by now the old man walked without stumbling.

"Good evening," the old man said.

The old man had a name. It was Ernst Schwergausser, but he preferred to think of himself only as Körner the Great. That's what had been written with jewel-like lights on theatre marquees all over the world and that was what was written now on the side of his battered truck with the back that lowered down on chains to make a stage. Körner the Great.

Körner the Great did not like dirty little bars and cafes but there was no place else in this town to get a drink because even the hotel

dining room was dirty. The whiskey had done him good. He felt better and more composed, and during the long, lonely walk back to the carnival he would figure out what to say to Louise.

"I love you," he would say. "I know I am very old but I love you and when you do the things you do it makes me so unhappy I wish only to die."

But when he got back to the truck he did not say anything because she was not there. He did not go looking for her. Instead he climbed into the trailer and poked about among his magical apparatus until he found a bottle of whiskey and he drank part of it down before crawling into the narrow bunk that swung down from the wall. He was still awake when he heard a man's voice and the sound of Louise's laughter right outside the door but he did not get up.

He lay there, listening, and when she finally came into the wagon they quarreled but he did not quarrel very loudly because he loved her.

Later, as he lay awake in the darkness, he told himself that tomorrow they would have to reach an understanding.

The following day was Sunday. The bartender did not get up in time for the football game on television but that afternoon he went to the carnival. He stood in front of the platform and watched the old man put on his magic show. The

old man was pretty good. He was pretty sharp. He showed a piece of newspaper and wadded it into a ball and then proceeded to take a live pigeon out of the middle of it. He did one where he put a whole dozen eggs in a little red cloth bag and when he turned the bag inside-out the eggs were gone.

The old man had a pretty girl assisting him and the bartender figured she must be his wife. The roustabout might have been kidding him about the axe but he had sure told the truth about the girl because she was more than pretty—she was beautiful. She wore a pair of spangled tights and when the old man wasn't doing a trick the bartender found himself looking at her young legs.

It is not a good thing for a young girl like that to have such an old husband, he said to himself.

For his last trick the old man lifted the lid of a wooden box that lay across two saw horses and let everyone look inside. Then the girl

got in the box and he closed the lid. It was like a coffin only shorter because her head and feet stuck out of the ends. Next he picked up a big cross-cut saw and showed it to everyone. When the bartender looked at the saw a peculiar feeling took hold of him but it only lasted a second. After all, he told himself, it is only a trick and the girl is smiling a very pretty smile.

The girl was a very good actress. She began to scream and toss her head about as the saw cut through the wood. She screamed and screamed and the people ate it up and some of them tossed nickels and dimes onto the stage. It was that good. It looked so real that when the screaming stopped a trickle of something that looked like blood began to seep through the slit made by the saw.

The bartender did not see the stuff that looked like blood because with the first scream he had turned and run as fast as he could along the dirt road that led back to town.



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*He was big time and he
knew the price. Now he
was ready to milk it
for . . .*

ONE BIG PAY-OFF

BY CHARLES SLOAN

TOWERS of neon hung above the gambling casinos, identifying the clubs, beckoning to any passing believers in Dame Fortune. The night lights of Virginia Street glistened in my wife's hair as I drove the rental car slowly under the Reno arch. BIGGEST, the sign vaunted, LITTLE CITY IN THE WORLD.

It had been five years since I'd seen that sign—five years since I'd left Reno.

I had come back to kill a man.

This would be my first contract in almost a year—since I'd met Ginny. To my wife, I was a salesman for a plastics firm. My attache case, filled with sales papers and reports,

was locked in the closet of our motel room, the .22 target automatic and silencer clipped firmly into its false side.

My first professional job had been here in Reno, still bright and vivid in my mind . . . *a crimson, beaten rag of a face, with swollen eyes and a gash of pleading mouth . . .*

Ginny hugged my arm, bringing me back to reality. "Isn't it exciting?" she demanded. "It's just like in the books and travelogues—a tiny magic town, lighted by jewels."

I growled. "It's a damn crowded place for a honeymoon."

She laughed. "Oh, Wies, I love you!"

"I love you, too, Mrs. Miller."

Ginny was a petite, honey-tressed bit of sex and energy with wide, dark eyes that glittered with constant holiday. She had been a teacher for nine years. She was thirty-one, a year older than I, but she regarded the world with naive wonder, as though she had absorbed a perpetual youth from the children she taught. She gave me a vicarious taste of adolescence I had never known in my slums and alleys and gutters.

I followed her through her magic town. She almost danced, a child allowed up late, each building offering some new delight—the flip of a dice cage, the spin of a wheel, the cadent call of the stickmen:

"All bets down. And seven! Seven the winner. Pay the line. And

he shoots again. Bets down, please. Odds on eleven. And five, five the gentleman's point . . ."

She fed the slots, squealing happily when she won. She listened while I explained the rudiments of blackjack, then bet in her own free-wheeling way against the turn of the cards. It was at Cassle's Club that she discovered the fascination of roulette.

The Club was run by two brothers, Mike and Phil Cassle. It was Mike who had sent the coded wire, three days ago on my wedding day, asking me to commit murder.

2.

Cassle's was much like any other Nevada casino, a vast amphitheater equipped to separate the sucker from a buck; from the bar offering liquid consolation, to the dice and card tables, bingo, and swirling wheels of chance. Things had changed, but I recognized one pit boss and a dealer—and Lige Johnson. I knew Johnson only from description. He was one of Mike Cassle's personal punks, a gray-haired stick of a man who had come up during prohibition. He had moved in where I had left off, five years ago.

Ginny leaned against the roulette table as the croupier rotated the wheel and set the ivory ball spinning in a *whirrr* of suspense. The ball clattered down into the numbered depressions. Ginny muttered

a quiet, "Damnl", as her chips were raked away. I rolled my eyes upward in mock sympathy. When I lowered them, Mike Cassle was coming across the floor toward us.

He was a little man with a clipped, mincing gait that carried him nimbly among the customers. He stopped, planting legs wide apart, and glared up at me.

"You took your sweet time gettin' here, Miller."

My mouth tightened. "Be happy I came at all. I'm not on your payroll anymore, little man."

His face went white, but he lifted the shoulders of his neat, dark suit. "So you're big time now. So you want'a talk?"

"That's why I came."

"Let's go. My office." He walked away.

Ginny had been watching, a frown on her tilted face. She touched my arm. "I'll be all right, Wies. Go ahead." She kissed at me from two feet away, and turned back to the gaming table. I followed Cassle across the floor.

3.

The office had been redecorated with green leather furniture and a modern steel desk, all-set atop a deep-pile chocolate carpet. Recessed were the gleaming metal doors of a vault, the doors ajar, a folding steel gate locked across the illuminated cubicle. Paper currency, coins, and casino chips were visible inside on

shelves. But even with the new surroundings, walking into that room was like stepping into the past, back across five years.

Because Stanley was there.

He was standing before the desk, polishing a huge silver ashtray with a dirty towel and humming a high, tuneless sound. Escaping air formed bubbles in the spittle at the corner of his mouth. His hair hung long and untrimmed, disappearing into the collar of his wrinkled, mismatched suit coat. As Cassle and I entered the room, Stanley's mouth opened in a wide, mirthless grin that revealed his toothless, hardened gums. He shuffled across the carpet, bringing a strong smell of sweat with him.

"I been cleanin', just like you told me, Mr. Cassle," he said, and the globule of froth fell from his mouth.

Mike Cassle was smirking at me, enjoying the spasm of my lips in distaste, the backward step I'd taken as the human caricature shambled toward us.

... my first job . . . still sharply etched on my brain . . . the bloodied chips of ivory as my fists and gun smashed the teeth from his mouth . . . the wet, meaty impact of his head, again and again, against the coarse brick of the alley wall . . . his thick, choked sobs of terror . . .

Stanley Wallace never completely recovered. The beating had left his mind and body shattered.

Cassle gestured. "Shake hands with Mr. Miller, Stanley. He's an old friend of yours."

Stanley's head bobbed loosely. He stuck his right hand out to me. My own closed reflexively about it. I shivered. The hand was twisted, the fingers stiff and curled. Lumps of badly mended cartilage and sinew swelled beneath the flesh. Stanley had been a top blackjack dealer, but he would never turn another card with those hands. I had made sure of that. I let go of the hand.

"Good to see you, Mr. Miller," Stanley said, but there was no recognition in the dullness of his eyes.

"Bourbon and water all right, Miller?" Cassle asked. He held up two fingers. "Make two of my drinks, Stanley."

Stanley brightened. He pointed at Cassle's fingers. "One! Two! You bet, Mr. Cassle!" He turned, then looked blankly at the tray and towel he held. He gave an ineffectual swipe at the tray and set it carefully on the desk. He went across the room, stuffing the soiled towel into his pocket.

Cassle sat down behind his desk, motioning me to a seat.

"Is he always like that?" I asked.

Cassle shrugged. "Sometimes he thinks a little more clearly, usually when he knows he's done something wrong." Cassle grinned. "You'd be surprised how scared Stanley gets, if he thinks he's gonna get hurt. Anyway, he's quite a legend around Reno."

"That why you keep him around?"

"More or less. He does odd jobs. Besides, he's a walking reminder that this casino is off-limits to hustlers. Nobody's tried a switch on the house since you worked Stanley over for me. Everybody knows I got my own protection."

Stanley returned, tongue caught between his gums as he balanced two drinks on a serving tray. He got them set down. "Okay, Mr. Cassle?"

"Just fine, Stanley. Finish cleaning up, now."

Stanley grinned happily and scurried away.

I sampled my drink, steadied my glass on my knee. "Something's missing, Mike," I said. "Where's your brother?"

Cassle stared across the desk at me. "Under six feet of Nevada dirt," he said levelly.

I blinked. "Phil is dead?"

"Five days ago. The cops think it was a hit-run."

"Wasn't it?"

Cassle snorted. "Phil was kidnapped eight days ago. The selling price was three hundred grand."

I gave a low whistle.

"Yeah," Cassle agreed. "But I paid it." He finished his bourbon and banged the glass down. "Only I marked over half the bills, the big ones, and spread them around through the bundles. Anyone sliced a cut of that pay-off, grabbed a fistful of dynamite."

I stared at him until he began to twist in his chair. Anger displaced the avarice that shaped his features whenever he spoke of money. "Okay, so it was risky! Phil would'a done the same thing. What the hell was I supposed to do, let 'em skip with a fortune?"

I shrugged. "It's your money—and your brother." I swallowed my drink and set the glass down beside Cassle's.

The marked bills had paid off, leading to a penny-ante gambler named Gingrich, still in Reno. Cassle sent Lige Johnson to find out who else was involved, so Cassle could turn it over to the police and recover the rest of the ransom. There had been three of them Gingrich; a grifter named Bill Lowe; and a woman. But Gingrich died of Johnson's persuasion before giving the woman's name. Johnson brought back Gingrich's share of the take, over three-fourths of it in large, marked bills. Cassle locked it in his vault to keep it out of circulation. It was still there.

"Only now," Cassle finished disgustedly, "if the law ever nabs Lowe or the broad, I'm tied in with the Gingrich kill."

"And that," I said, "is where I come in."

Cassle grunted. "I've traced Lowe to San Francisco. I want you to bring back his share of the loot, and find out who and where the dame is." He stood and picked up our empty glasses. "Then I want Lowe

dead." He went to the bar to make refills.

It gave me time to think about how I could make this job really pay off. If I collected Lowe's share of the ransom—a possible hundred grand or more—then cleaned out Cassle's vault . . . Ginny and I could go a long ways in high style, and Cassle couldn't even yell cops. If I could just keep Cassle from thinking along those same lines . . .

He came back with the drinks. I waited for him to sit down, and said, "It will cost you forty thousand, Mike."

He exploded half out of his chair, then settled slowly back. "You really have gone big time," he gasped.

"You need a pro, someone who won't screw up like Johnson. You'll pay, no matter who you get."

I sipped my drink, giving him time to think, now, about how cheap forty grand was, compared to what Nevada courts would do to him if he were ever connected with Gingrich. When he spoke, his voice was tired, defeated. "Half now, half when you deliver."

I shrugged, nodded.

He started to rise, then fell back like a man exhausted from running too hard from too many things. He called and Stanley came loping to the desk. Cassle dug a key from his pocket. "I want money from the vault, Stanley." He held up the spread fingers of both hands, twice. "Bring twenty packets."

Stanley mimicked Cassle's gesture with his own deformed fingers and scooped up the key. "You bet, Mr. Cassle!"

We waited silently while he labored with the lock, pushed aside the folding gate, and entered the lighted vault. Cassle paid no attention. He was staring at me with a new-found hate. I watched Stanley over Cassle's shoulder. He painstakingly selected a shelf and began collecting stacks of bills. It took quite a while. When he came out, he crossed to the desk and dropped his green burden. "Twenty! Right, Mr. Cassle?"

Cassle's eyes never left my face. He shoved the pile toward me, twenty thousand in paper-banded packets of a thousand each, along with a pleated manilla folder from this desk. I filled the folder and stood. "I'll be back for the rest."

I walked out of the office, leaving Mike Cassle slumped at his desk with Stanley Wallace hovering, expectant and grotesque, beside him.

4.

Ginny was pensive during the warm ride back to the motel, contrite over her fifty-dollar loss at Cassle's roulette wheel. In our room, I showed her the contents of the folder. She was elated. I evaded explanations, only that I had business, alone, in San Francisco. She grew quiet again, but our good-night was tender.

The next morning—after removing a thousand dollars—I handed the folder to Ginny. "I'll be back tonight. Pack this in your suitcase and be ready to leave." I divided the thousand, keeping four hundred in small bills. I gave her the rest. "Have a shopping spree, Mrs. Miller. You'll feel better."

She hugged me fiercely. "Hurry back, Wies. Then I'll feel better."

I held her for a long while. "Spend the money anyway," I said finally. "We can afford it." I patted her trim back side, grinning. "Maybe get a new girdle, huh?"

Her mouth formed a startled, breathless "O". She tried grimly to step on my toes, but it cheered her up. She sat close beside me all the way to the airport, holding my attache case with its hidden lethal contents, and chattering like a housewife seeing her husband off to work.

5.

In Frisco, I checked Cassle's location on Lowe, a walk-up on Third. Lowe's wife, a day-waitress in a cheap diner, had been renting the flat for a month, but Lowe had arrived just three days ago. Lowe's wife hadn't missed a day's work in six weeks, so she couldn't be the woman in the Reno caper. She was working today, which would put Lowe alone in the apartment. At a hardware, I bought a woven clothesline, and the nozzle and

handtank that make up a propane blowtorch. I squeezed them into the attache case and headed for Lowe's room.

The building was one big, dirty smell. Faded wallpaper had long since peeled away, revealing gray-plaster walls, like the sallow skin of a washed-up stripper. I went up three flights to a door in a dark, empty hall. From beyond the thin panel came the scuffling tread of shoes over threadbare carpet. A bureau drawer grated. I tried the locked door. The noises stopped. I knocked, twice, then kicked the door.

"Lowe," I said. "I got word from Gingrich."

Silence.

"Suit yourself," I said.

I went down the creaking steps as far as the landing before Lowe came out of the room and pointed a gun at me. He was tall, with scrub whiskers covering his elongated face. "Come up here," he said, "with your hands on your head."

I remounted the stairs, following as Lowe backed into his room, slammed the door. The spring lock clicked. Lowe ran his hand over me and stepped back. An open suitcase shared the sagging bed with crumpled newspapers, and wrinkled clothing hung from bureau drawers.

"You won't get far," I said. "Not on the dough you got from Cassle. It's marked."

"Nuts."

I let go of the attache case I held in my upraised hands. It bounced on the seat of the room's solitary chair. "Gingrich's was. Check it." I moved away.

Lowe licked his lips. His eyes shifted from me to the case, and he half-turned to flip the snaps. I stepped beyond the muzzle of the gun, my raised hands clasped and slashing downward. Even as Lowe reared back, the blow smashed the bridge of his nose. Blood spurted and he sat down onto the floor, unconscious. I got him spread-eagled on the double bed, hands and feet lashed to the corner posts with my clothesline.

I searched the apartment. I found what I wanted in the bathroom. Lowe had split the float from the toilet tank, taped the key inside, cemented the ball together, and returned it to the tank. The key was numbered, the type used for public lockers.

Back in the bedroom, I found Lowe awake. His nose was still bleeding and he kept spitting blood off his lips. I questioned him, but got nothing but wisecracks, and I wanted to be back in Reno that night.

I got the torch from the case. It was adjustable from a pencil flame to blast at 2300 degrees Fahrenheit. I gagged Lowe with a sock from the dresser. He lied to me four times before his story matched the key I'd found. He named a bus sta-

tion on Seventh, and described where he'd hidden the key. When I freed his mouth the last time, the gag was soaked with vomit. That, with the stench of burned hair and flesh, made the room smell like a garbage can left out in the sun too long.

I leaned over Lowe. "Who was the woman?"

He sounded like a surgical case coming out of anaesthesia. "... Gin'rich's girl ... Ro ... Rose Hurst ..."

I tore the ring off his left hand, a white-gold wedding band engraved with a leaf design. I tossed it on the palm of my hand. "You're lying. It was Gingrich and you—and your wife."

His eyes came half-alive. He rolled his head weakly, negatively. "... not her ... please ... Mary workin' rest'ant, all time ... not her ... Rose Hurst ... still in Reno ..."

He was too far gone to mix lies with truth. I was satisfied I had what I wanted. I got the gun from the case, adjusted the silencer. It made two soft sounds, like a fat man smacking his lips. I dropped the ring beside the body, went out of the room and shut the door. The lock clicked.

I was on the third step down when a thin, dark woman rounded the landing below me. She wore a soiled, white-nylon uniform and carried a new and cheap-looking valise. She looked into my face as

she came up and by me. She unlocked Lowe's door and pushed it open. My gun made its soft sound. The woman put out her left hand and clutched the doorjamb for a second before she fell. The hand bore a white-gold band with a leaf design.

6.

By midnight, I was back in Reno, standing before Cassle's Club with my empty attache case and a brown-leather traveling satchel containing Lowe's \$100,000. I was paying the cabby when Mike Cassle drove into the parking lot. He opened the door on the passenger's side for me.

"That it?" he demanded.

At my nod, he took the Mercury to the back of the building. He slid from the car, leaving the keys in the ignition and beckoning me to follow. He opened a steel fire door and went along a short corridor to his office. Two men waited there, one of them using the phone. He spoke into the receiver, then handed it to Cassle with a sigh of relief. I sat down in front of the desk, the two cases on my lap, my fingers curled around the .22 in my pocket.

Cassle muffled the receiver. "Where's Stanley?"

The stooge shrugged. "He ain't been here all day, Mr. Cassle. I don't know where . . ."

"Okay, okay! Mix me a bourbon and water." Cassle dropped his hand and barked into the phone,

"Johnson? You got her?" He listened, and a slow smile spread across his face. "Okay. Get the rest of the money. Then make sure she never talks to any cops, Johnson. Clean up the mess you got me into."

He cradled the receiver, and his smile became a sneer. "For a big-time pro, you ain't too hot, Miller. We already got the broad, ourselves."

I was surprised. "You found Rose Hurst?"

"Yeah, if that's her name. She walked into the club tonight and passed a whole handful of marked bills over my tables."

"And you let her walk out?"

"I wasn't here. Lige Johnson caught the bills and tailed her until he could get in touch with me. He's with her right now."

I pursed my lips. Lowe had said Rose Hurst was still in Reno, right under Cassle's nose, just like Gingrich. It was possible she didn't know anyone was on to her. She probably thought it was cute, playing Cassle's tables with his own money. How could she lose? The only trouble was, she couldn't win.

Cassle's grin began to irk me. "What makes you think Johnson won't foul up again, Mike? He's still a punk."

The sneer disappeared. "That's my worry." He swallowed his bourbon. "I'll take that money, now."

I stood and moved to the end of the desk where I could see Cassle and both his men. I took the gun

out of my pocket and pointed it at them. "You've got that backwards, little man," I said. I dropped my attache case and kicked it across the carpet toward the stooge who had been using the phone.

"Give him the key to the vault, Mike," I said.

"Like hell I will!"

I leaned across the corner of the desk and buried the gun barrel in the hollow beneath his ribs. Air bellowed out of him. He produced the key.

The stooge was faster than Stanley Wallace had been. He filled the case in five minutes. In another ten, Cassle and his boys were locked inside the vault and I was in Cassle's car, headed toward the motel to pick up Ginny.

7.

The Mercury purred along Virginia Street toward the outskirts of the city. I rolled down the window and leaned back. I was away clear, though it wouldn't take any great genius to find the motel where I was registered, if only by giving my description. I had maybe a half hour to pick up Ginny and the nineteen thousand I'd left with her, and put a lot of Nevada miles between ourselves and Reno. I took one hand off the wheel and touched the money bags. Everybody's entitled to at least one big pay-off in his lifetime and this was mine. I had anywhere from one hundred to

three hundred grand of Mike Cassle's blood in those bags, and he couldn't even call the cops.

Ahead, like sculptured fire against the sky, was the motel sign. I swung into the drive. The vacancy sign was up and the parking lot at this end was nearly empty. There was only the rental car Ginny had used today, and a new Pontiac convertible, parked side by side. I angled in and cut the Mercury's lights and motor. Lights were on inside our room, outlining the closed venetian blinds.

A hand came through the open window of the car and took hold of my shoulder.

I had the .22 pointed at his face before I realized who it was. Stanley's dull eyes loomed wide above lips pulled apart over empty gums. "I been waitin' all day, Mr. Miller! You got to give me back the money, before Mr. Cassle finds out what I done!"

I placed a palm atop the bags on the seat beside me. "What money?"

"What I got outa' the vault for you yesterday! Mr. Cassle told me not to touch it, but there was so much, I got mixed up."

I opened the car door. "You don't make sense. Get away!"

Stanley cringed, staring across his shoulder at my motel room. "You gotta keep quiet!" he gasped. "Mr. Johnson's in there. He might hear . . ."

But I was out of the car by then, knocking Stanley to the ground as

I flung the door wide. I stepped over him and went along the walk, as silently as my panic would permit. I took hold of the doorknob to my room, and stopped. Rushing in, getting killed, wouldn't help Ginny at all. I could hear voices inside.

"... you sure this is the right dame?"

"She passed the hot bills at the roulette wheel tonight. I checked the goddamn things myself! Now keep lookin'."

"What if it ain't here . . . Hey! Hey, Lige, I found it! In the suitcase! It's marked, too. But there's only nineteen grand! Boy, Mr. Cassle sure ain't gonna like this . . ."

. . . Ginny . . .

. . . *it had been Ginny that Johnson had seen at the gaming tables . . . not Rose Hurst . . .*

And suddenly, clearly . . . terribly . . . Stanley Wallace's words began to make sense. . . .

I had my key in the lock, forced my shaking hand to turn it. The door inched inward. I gripped my gun and went into the room.

. . . and met horror . . .

She was on the floor. One of her hands was knotted in the spread she had pulled from the bed. It had draped itself across her breast, leaving the rest of her body nude. Where the absorbent cloth touched her, it was crimsoned stained, as though a surrealist rose had been carefully woven into the fabric. And criss-crossing her entire body, like open,

ugly, scarlet lips, were knife wounds.

And she was dead.

. . . *Ginny was dead . . .*

We had been motionless—Lige Johnson, the second man, and myself. I moved, my gun swinging up and spitting death. The first shot was for Johnson, and a small, livid boil erupted between his eyes as he fell. The second man threw the manilla folder he had taken from the suitcase. It missed me, hitting the wall. Money spilled onto the floor.

. . . money . . . bills Stanley Wallace had taken from Cassle's vault, from the pile of marked ransom money Lige Johnson had recovered from Gingrich . . . twenty thousand dollars worth of ironic, latent death given to me as payment for Bill Lowe's life . . . money I had given Ginny for a "shopping spree" . . . money she had used, instead, at Cassle's roulette wheel . . .

The man dropped behind the

bed, his hand searching inside his coat. I moved forward, around the foot of the bed, and pointed my gun down at him. He fired, too, with a .45 automatic, and a great hand of fire and strength slapped me in the chest. I saw my shot take the man full in the face, and then I went down onto the floor.

* * *

. . . *I should never have come back . . .*

I can't see Ginny from where I lie. There is only Stanley Wallace bending over me, clutching the money he has gathered from the floor. He grins, and I can smell the sour breath from his toothless mouth, like a fetid odor from a long-dug grave. He shambles to the door and turns. For a fleeting instant, the dullness seems to leave his eyes, and he tilts his head with a hint of recollection, a remembrance of an alley, and pain, and fear . . . but then it is gone, and there is only the empty smile as he closes the door behind him.



THE PUNKS had the corner again. They weren't wild yet, just some loud cutting up and girl-baiting. But he was with them, and to get him I'd have to rap them all. They'd catch on soon. Roust them enough and eventually they would know why. Him.

"Break it up!" I yelled, and the noise switched off. They muttered and got surly as they always did,



THE PUNK

BY HERBERT LESLIE GREENE

He was getting to him, he could see it in his face. Just time and patience. Keep pushing, build the pressure up. The punk would crack.

but they were getting used to it, so they moved. Mean and slow.

I shoved among them, toward him. He was loungeing against the Coke box. He watched me come and his face got tight and his eyes hard. The color went out of his cheeks. He was burning inside, burning. He stood up straight when I got to him, looked me in the eye. "Don't hit me, cop." he said, and his voice shook. It was good to hear.

I tossed the club from one hand to the other, fast. He flinched. I smiled at him and his body trembled with pure hate. "Move it," I told him softly.

"What do you want outta me?" His voice rose a level. The pressure was splitting him. Every day it got heavier. Every time I saw him. And he didn't know why and it was driving him crazy.

"You want another taste of this, Frankie?" I held the club under his nose and he started to sweat. It was so bad for him now that he didn't even try to act for his buddies anymore. "What do you want outta me?" This time it was a tired whimper.

I told him pleasantly, "I just want you to move, Frankie, and you're still standing here."

"I never done nuthin' to you, cop. Why you on me all the time? Why always on me?"

"You notice that, huh?"

"Yeah . . ."

"Well, that's good. Maybe, before

long now, you'll figure out a way to get me off you, like for you to clear outta this neighborhood. Maybe outta this town."

"What did I do?" There were tears in his eyes. His tough jaw quivered.

"Move it, Frankie." I flipped the club again. He moved, lurching away, head down. I watched him go, with his crew trailing him. They trailed him looser this time. They were catching on.

I went off duty an hour later. When I got home Marge had supper on the table. It was Thursday, so it was lamb chops, like every Thursday. I ate as fast as I could while she gabbed, asking me how my day was, telling me about hers, what Mrs. so-and-so said, what old man so-and-so did. I nodded every few minutes and grunted and she was satisfied.

"I gotta go back to the station tonight." I told her.

"Again?" Before we were married I used to enjoy that little-girl frown and moan when things went bad for her. But it didn't fit her anymore. Her face was heavier. She was too much of a woman. Now the frown was ludicrous; the moan, a whine.

"Sorry," I said easily. "That case is running us all ragged. Extra duty for everybody, from the commissioner down."

"I never see you anymore."

I stroked her and grinned meaningfully. "I'll make it up to you."

She blushed and that didn't fit either. Big, well-broken, thirty-year-old women like her shouldn't blush. "I don't mean because of that," she whined. "I just want to see you more. You're my husband. I'll forget what you look like."

"You better not. You might go to bed with a stranger."

She was shocked. "Don't talk like that! Only you, you know that." She gripped my fingers. "It's the same with you, isn't it? It's only me, isn't it? Isn't it, Roy?"

"Only you, sweetheart."

She blushed again and dropped her eyes, like a ruined maiden. "Oh, I do miss you, Roy. So much . . ."

I left the car where I always did, in the alley beside the darkened factory, and went like a thief through the shadows, to the tenement in the middle of the block. I climbed the creaking stairs to the third floor and the door swung open before I reached it. I went in and put my arms around her and held her a long time without saying a word. It was like coming home. Really coming home.

"Hello," she said to me.

I looked into her face. Her eyelids were heavy, and her lips. They hung apart, moist, the breath coming hard from them. The flush looked good on her. Everything looked good on her. "Hello Lea, hello baby . . ."

I lay in bed next to her and ran my hand over her body just for the sheer pleasure of touching the firm girl-hard flesh, so young and warm. She nestled against me, silent, content. And that was good for me too; to know I could content a girl like that. "I bumped into your boyfriend today," I told her.

I felt her stiffen in my arms. "Damn you!" she whispered fiercely. "What the hell do you want from me? A signed statement that I hate his guts? A photostat of the scar on my head?"

"He won't put any more scars on you. I guarantee that. He won't be around much longer."

She was soft again, clinging. "You be careful with him. He can be rotten mean."

"Him? To a kid like you he's rotten mean. To me, he's a punk. A punk who gets his kicks out of slugging girls."

"He wasn't always like that. He just got mad when . . . when he knew there was somebody else. He wanted me to tell him who it was. He blew up when I wouldn't. He hit me."

"You feel sorry for him?"

"I don't feel nothing for him. I haven't any feelings to spare, anymore. I need them all for you." She searched for my mouth with hers. We kissed and it was like it was so often between us, a seemingly endless, burning thing. I held her so tightly I thought I'd break that slender body of hers, but she drove

in, never pulling back, never giving up. "Roy . . ." she gasped, and we were gone again.

And I had to leave her as I always did. It was rough to do. I tried to slip her some money again, but she only made that face and I put it away, quick. "I hate to go," I told her by the door, holding her close. "I hate it more all the time."

"When you hate it enough, then stay."

"Soon, baby, soon. This has all been so fast. Give me a little more time to think, to plan. I've been with her for ten years. It won't be easy to kick her in the face."

"I don't want you to kick her in the face. I don't want to hurt her. I've seen too much pain in my life. If I were stronger I'd tell you to go back to her and stay there. I'd never have let it happen between us the first time. But I'm not stronger. I'm weak. With you. You take my strength. All I can say to you is, use the time you need. I'll be here whenever you want me, for as long as you want me, anyway you want me. Doesn't it make you feel like a king to be able to twist a girl up like that?"

"Yeah, you make me feel like a king . . ."

I reached for the doorknob and she whispered "Be careful of Frank, Roy. Watch out for him. If he should ever find out about us, that it's you . . ."

"I'm not afraid of Frank. I could never be afraid of Frank. There is nothing that punk can do to me."

"Then be afraid for me. Fear him for me and be careful."

"I'm careful. I'll sneak out like I sneak in. I'll creep through the streets like a rat. But not for long. It won't be for long. I promise you that."

"I love you, Roy . . ."

I made it home as fast as I could because I knew Marge would be up and waiting, with a cup of hot chocolate for me, and cookies. She would be wrapped in the faded blue robe she wore on our honeymoon. It would bulge as it never did, then. Her hair would be done up in hunks of metal and her face sallow under thick cream. She would feed me my little snack and sit with me and gab until we'd go to bed. Then she would crawl to me and beg, in that puppy-dog way of hers and I would tell her that I was tired, tired from pounding a beat so late and she would say "Alright sweetie," and a moment later be snoring away. And I would lay there next to her, grateful for her stupidity and a little angry over it, wondering how she could help but know. I felt that I wore Lea like an overcoat. I felt that her marks were on my face, her smell all over me. But Marge would snore away, flabby, greased, unknowing.

The light was on when I reached the house. I parked the car and went in, thinking I'd puke if I had to drink that chocolate tonight. But there was no chocolate. She was asleep on the couch, in that lousy blue robe, snoring through pouting lips. I was glad of that. Glad she couldn't keep awake. I wasn't able to take the routine tonight, not tonight. It had been too good with Lea.

I moved as quiet as I could, wanting to get to bed before she woke up. As I went by her she shivered, cold. I looked down at her and she seemed, suddenly, very vulnerable, very pitiable. I watched her sleep and wondered where my Marge had gone, the girl I married. It had been good with us, once. At times, with Lea, I saw

Marge, as she was ten years ago. Where did she go? Probably away with me, as I was, ten years ago. We change, and it's sad. She shivered again and stirred. I felt an ache inside of me, for every sad, changed person in the world. I went and got a blanket and, very carefully, laid it across my wife.

She moved under it, moaned and said softly, "Frankie . . . Frankie baby . . ." and she reached out in her sleep for him.

The punks were on the corner. They scattered as soon as they saw me. He was there. I went up to him and saw the fear in his face. "Leave me alone, cop." he pleaded.

"Move it, Frankie." I told him, and flipped the club.



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the pervert

HAPPY HOMES" is a child ridden GI tract (ONLY \$99 DOWN FOR VETS) unique only by its sameness. The September evening quiet of the Los Angeles suburb was jarred as thirty some enraged citizens milled on the Murphy front lawn cursing the imagined tardiness of the Citrus City police. Four minutes and six seconds after receiving the radio call, officers Greenwald and Rogers parked the black squad car in front of the Murphy residence.

With a practiced torpidness the two officers made their way across the lawn to the front door ignoring the babblings of the crowd. Greenwald wiped the dripping perspiration from his tanned, and admittedly, ugly face. Deadpan he glanced back at the curious canaille. Nine years of being a pa-

trolman and the end result was the banal formula: "citizen equals asshole".

From the open front door a husky thirty year old in levis impatiently waved the officers inside.

"Trouble?" asked Rogers removing his cap.

"You're damn right," barked Murphy, "The old bastard across the street was messing with my kid."

Florid with anger Murphy took a quick drag on an unlit cigarette; frustrated he threw it at the blaring television set.

"Turn that damn thing off," yelled Murphy.

Murphy's skinny, young wife quickly flicked off a grinning Captain Kangeroo. Mrs. Murphy stood weeping by the set, her rather hairy arms hung vinelike around her

The residents of "Happy Homes" housing development milled about angrily on the Murphy's front lawn. There was a pervert in their midst.

BY T. K. FITZPATRICK

eight year old daughter. The girl who had been intently watching the good Captain, was now impassively staring at the officers. A fleshy woman in a floppy mu mu sat on the coach, her arms enveloped a sobbing eight year old girl. Murphy nodded to the females.

"Linda my daughter, and that's Mrs. Fisher and her kid Diane. She was there too."

"I see," acknowledged Rogers, "we'd like to talk to the girls."

"Please don't upset them anymore," whined Mrs. Murphy.

"We won't," said Rogers. "Come here girls."

Linda Murphy tossed her long blonde curls and skipped over to the kneeling officer. Diane Fisher shed more copious tears as her mother shooed her gently to Rogers. Greenwald leaned against the wall; dead pan. Opening his notebook, Rogers began talking paternally.

"I'm Officer Rogers and I want to talk to you girls; there is nothing to be afraid of. Okay?"

Linda nodded, while Diane kept sobbing.

"Linda and Diane, do you both go to Sunday school?"

The girls nodded proudly in the affirmative.

"Then you both know it's a bad sin to tell a lie?"

Again the girls nodded. Again Diane became convulsed with sobbing and her fat mother showered her with wet kisses. Greenwald watched impassively.

"Mummy and daddy say it's very bad to tell a fib," recited Linda. Rogers noticed Linda's eyes were a deep violet and she never lost eye contact with him.

"That's right Linda; now do you want to tell me what happened today?"

"The Skipper touched us in a naughty place."

"Who is this Skipper?"

"Mr. Morgan, the old man across the street."

"Now Linda will you please touch the place on your body that the Skipper touched?"

"Is that necessary?" snapped Mrs. Murphy.

"Yes Maam," said Rogers. "Go ahead Linda, it's all right."

"The Skipper touched us both here," said Linda Murphy as she pointed to her crotch area. Fred Murphy swore as he slammed a muscled arm against the front door.

"God isn't that enough?" Murphy yelled. "Let's get him—now."

"In just a minute Mr. Murphy; we've got to first establish a case," said Rogers calmly. "Linda, did this Skipper kiss you?"

"Yes sir."

"Where?"

"All over."

"Mr. Morgan, or the Skipper, did these things to both of you?"

"Yes sir," said Linda as the weeping Diane nodded her head.

"Where and at what time did all this happen today?"

"In the Morgan's backyard," Linda paused, "in the afternoon, kinda late."

"This is the last question," said Rogers glancing at the fidgeting father. "Has this Skipper ever touched you girls before today?"

"Lots of times, but we didn't tell anybody cuz—" Linda Murphy began sniffing softly, "cuz he said he'd hurt us if we ever told."

Rogers uncoiled slowly to his full six feet automatically smoothing the creases in his blue pants. The younger man looked at his partner.

"What do you think?" half whispered Rogers.

"You're booking," growled Greenwald as he tipped his cap to the back of his big head, "but I think this Skipper should hit the bucket."

"Jail?" questioned Murphy.

"Jail," growled Greenwald.

The curious neighborhood crowd had grown. The officers ignored their questions as they strode across the street to the Morgan residence. Diane Fisher's father was pounding on the front door of the neat white stucco home. Greenwald ordered the sweating little man off the property. Bellowing a stream of epithets, Fisher complied after surveying Greenwald's considerable bulk.

The front door opened a crack. Geraldine Morgan, thirty-nine, plain and unmarried, stared out at the officers silhouetted in the porch light.

"Yes?"

"Police," said Rogers. "We'd like to speak to Mr. Morgan please?"

"I'm his daughter and—"

"May we step in please," said Greenwald as he pushed open the door and was inside before the woman could protest. Rogers closed the door as the curiosity seekers had crept up to the porch. Standing in the middle of the immaculate living room was a matronly woman in her fifties. The color was drained from her face but she immediately began talking.

"I'm Mrs. Johnston; I'm the Morgan's neighbor and I—"

"Excuse me, but we'd like to talk to Miss Morgan privately if you please," interrupted Rogers.

"Anything you have to say can be said in front of her," murmured Geraldine Morgan.

"Does a Wilber Morgan reside here?" asked Rogers.

"Yes, he's my father."

"Where was he this afternoon?"

"Here, while Mrs. Johnston and I were shopping."

"Is he here now?"

Mrs. Johnston grabbed Rogers by the arm. "Listen officer that Murphy girl is wicked; she's a little liar," Mrs. Johnston bit her lip and continued, "why the Skipper is the kindest, most wonderful old gentleman; he buys all the kids on the block ice cream when the Good Humor man comes by and—"

"Where is he, Miss Morgan?" tersely interrupted Greenwald.

"He's my father; I know him!"
The tears began to stream. "He
loves children—"

"Sure," mumbled Greenwald,
"he loves them; now where is he?"

The daughter threw her hands to her face and sobbed. Rogers found the Skipper fully clothed sitting on the commode. A battered yachting cap was perched on his hoary head. A stream of stuttering garble was all the old man could reply to Roger's questioning. Greenwald shook his head and loosely locked his handcuffs around the slim, quivering wrists. The blue bulk of Greenwald all but blotted out the thin figure as he led the old man out the front door.

On the street a cry went up from the crowd. Rogers shoved Fred Murphy away as he tried to swing on the old man. As Greenwald opened the rear door of the squad car, Henry Fisher edged in close enough to spit. A wad of yellow

saliva hung precariously on the sunken cheekbone. The Skipper stopped stuttering and began to wail, not cry, but wail.

The black squad car with the wailing old man moved slowly through the cursing crowd and out of "Happy Homes".

In the neat white house Geraldine Morgan fought to control her tears. Outside on the Morgan's front yard the too thin Mrs. Murphy shrilly screamed: "Sex-fiend bastard!" Now Geraldine Morgan wept; wept hard.

On the Murphy's front porch Diane and Linda stood holding hands while intently watching the spectacle.

"That was fun," said Diane, "shall we do it tomorrow?"

"No," smiled Linda, "we better wait a little while."

The girls stopped their giggling as their mothers started back up the lawn.



Cory looked down on the street from the window. A prowler car cruised past . . . the sixth one in an hour. The cops moved fast when one of their own got it.



The Loners

BY CLARK HOWARD

CORY stood huddled just inside the mouth of the alley, smoking nervously. Cold sweat stood out on his face. A sick nausea was beginning to spread throughout his stomach. Under one arm he held a white bag packed with sheafs of currency. In his waistband under his windbreaker, a loaded .38 rested heavily. Behind him—a mile away, half an hour back—lay three dead men.

Two of the dead men had been buddies of his; the buddies he went in on the stickup with. The third had been a cop. The job had come off badly, nothing like they planned. The cop had been a good shot while he lasted; good enough to chill Louie and Irv. And now Cory was alone. Alone and in trouble. Big trouble. Dead cop trouble.

A woman pushing a buggy passed by the alley and looked at

him suspiciously. Cory glared back at her and she moved on. Can't stay here, he thought. Can't just stand around. Got to move.

He stepped from the alley and crossed the street. A row of brownstones faced him. Picking one at random, he walked quickly up the steps and entered the hallway. There were eight mailboxes in the foyer. He glanced at the names. None of them meant anything to him.

Lighting a fresh cigarette, he turned to look back out the door at the street. It must be nearly five, he thought. Already people were beginning to come home from work. He had to find a place to hide—and soon. And it had to be close by. There would be no chance of getting out of the area; by now the dragnet was open, the streets would be covered. Cops move fast when one of their own gets it.

He was so immersed in his own troubled thoughts that he did not even notice the girl with the bag of groceries until she was halfway up the steps. There was no time to think of anything to cover himself, to make his presence in the hall look legitimate; so he just stepped back from the door to let her enter. She glanced at him curiously but said nothing. He watched from the corner of his eye as she opened one of the mailboxes, saw there was nothing for her and closed it again. Then she went on through the inner door and started upstairs.

Cory moved over to look at the box she had opened. The name on it was Miss Lena Fuller. Lena, he thought idly, what a square name. Then he frowned, a more serious thought coming to him. *Miss Lena Fuller*; that meant she wasn't married. And no other name on the box, so no roommate. No nobody, probably. Square Miss Lena must live all by her lonesome.

Cory opened the inner door and followed the girl upstairs. She was just putting her key in the lock of one of the third floor apartments when he walked up to her. He pulled the .38 from under his jacket and held it low, not pointed at her but so that she could see it.

"Don't you say a word, sister," he warned. "Just do what I tell you and you won't get hurt. You got me?"

The girl parted her lips to speak but no words came. She managed to nod that she understood.

"Anybody live here with you?" Cory wanted to know. Again no words but a negative shake of her head. "Okay," he said, "go on inside. You're gonna have company for awhile."

He followed her into the apartment, the gun still in his hand.

News of the aborted holdup spread over the lower West Side like wildfire. Dead, in addition to the patrolman, were Louis Dragna and Irving Greenspan. At large was Cory Ahearn. It hadn't taken the law very long to figure that one

out. The two dead men and Ahearn had been thick for years. They were a well known trio. The Big Dago, the Little Kike and Black Irish Ahearn; they were like brothers. Brothers of the street.

Now two of the brothers were dead. And the third might as well have been for all the chance he was given.

He ain't got a prayer, they were saying in the poolrooms that night. There's a dead copper on his back. The only thing he's got left to worry about is whether he checks out with a belly full of cop bullets or sitting in the electric chair.

He's finished, they said around the back room card tables. There ain't a place he can go, ain't a person who'll help him. He's a cop killer now and that means his grave is already dug. There's a slab in the morgue that's already got his name on it.

But he's a tough kid, some of the others argued. Tough and smart. And he got away with part of the bread from the job. If he plays it cool, with a little luck he might make it. He just might make it. Maybe.

All of them talked. The hoods, the gamblers, the punks and junkies; all the night people, the people in the know. All up and down the streets of the lower West Side, the tenderloin. They talked and they speculated on the life expectancy of Cory Ahearn. By eight o'clock that Thursday night the odds were

three to one he wouldn't make it through Sunday. And even money he wouldn't last until morning.

No one knew better than Cory Ahearn himself just how short the odds against him were. No one realized more than himself just how alone he was in his plight. A cop killer had no friends. A cop killer had no future. All that awaited him was a violent death of one kind or another; and nobody wanted to share that with him.

Standing now at the window of Lena Fuller's apartment, the gun still in his hand, Cory looked down on the street below and saw a prowler cruise slowly past. It was the sixth one he had seen in an hour. A big net, he thought. A tight net. There'd be no chance at all of getting through it; not unless he had some help.

He glanced back into the room. The girl was sitting on one end of the couch, her coat still on, the bag of groceries on the floor next to her. She was looking at him, watching his every move. He ignored her and resumed his surveillance of the street.

There was one guy, he thought. One guy he might be able to trust to help him. A funny little guy named Spots who hung around the poolroom. He had always liked Cory since the day Cory had rousted a couple of punks who were roughing up Spots just for kicks. From then on he had been like a shadow to Cory; always around to

run an errand for him or give him a shoeshine or rack the balls when Cory shot pool. Kind of an odd little guy, Spots was, and not very bright at all. He had a shaggy little mongrel dog he carried everywhere he went. For a long time the dog had gone without a name, until one day Cory had said, "Spots, where'd you get that mutt anyway?" Since that time the dog's name had been Mutt. And the odd little guy known as Spots had been proud that his dog had been named by Black Irish Ahearn, one of the hardest hoodlums on the West Side.

Yeah, Cory thought now, if anyone in the world would be willing to help him, it would be Spots. He turned away from the window and noticed the girl still staring at him.

"Do you have to keep looking at me like that?" he snapped. "Why don't you read a magazine or something? I already told you I wasn't gonna hurt you."

The girl cast her eyes downward and clasped her hands tightly on her knees. Her lower lip trembled briefly, making Cory feel suddenly ashamed that he had spoken so harshly. He lighted a cigarette and quietly studied the girl for a few moments. She was very pale of face, and thin but not badly proportioned. Her hair was styled poorly and her makeup gave the impression that either she had been careless in its selection or else lacked the usual female intuition of its proper use. This, added to the un-

favorable dark grey of her dress, gave her an overall appearance of drabness and insignificance. Cory was sure he would not have looked twice at her had they passed on the street. In fact, he probably would not even have looked *once*. Still, he regretted having spoken so sharply to her. For some unexplainable reason, he did not want the girl to be afraid of him. He slipped the gun back under his belt and moved away from the window.

"Look," he said quietly, "I didn't mean to sound tough with you. It's just that I'm in a jam, see, and I'm kind of jumpy. And when you keep staring at me like that I get edgy. Now look, I'll tell you what, why don't you just try to forget I'm here, huh? Just go ahead and do whatever you'd do, like I wasn't even around. I'll keep out of the way and won't bother you at all. Only don't go near the door, okay? Is it a deal?"

The girl did not look back up at him, or even answer him aloud. Obviously still frightened, she again failed to find words and merely nodded.

"Good," said Cory. "You'll be all right, so don't worry. Look, I gotta use your phone now, okay?"

She nodded again and he walked over to the telephone stand in the corner. While he was dialing, the girl got up and took the bag of groceries into a tiny Pullman kitchen off the living room. Cory

watched her put the things away while his number was ringing. Presently a bored voice answered at the other end.

"Slattery's, Ed speaking." Cory could hear the sharp click-click of pool balls in the background."

"Is Spots around?" he asked.

"Just a minute." The voice turned away from the receiver and yelled, "Spots, telephone!" A moment later a quiet, hesitant voice said, "Hello?"

"Spots?"

"Yeah, who's this?"

"This is Cory. I'm in a jam and I need some help. You with me?"

"Sure, Cory, sure," Spots said eagerly. "I already heard. I been worried—"

"Okay, okay. Now listen to me, Spots; listen very carefully and do exactly as I say."

Cory Ahearn began talking. The instructions he gave Spots were simple but precise, repeated slowly to make sure Spots understood. Cory was taking no chances. He had no margin for error. His life hung in the balance.

Thirty minutes later the little man named Spots entered the block where Cory was hiding. He walked slowly along the street, watching the numbers carefully. There was a slight shuffle to his gait, inherent from years of listless living in the night world of which he was a part. His mouth hung open a little underneath the look of confusion that was invariably

cast over his features. He wore a too-large longshoreman's coat that flapped loosely in the early evening wind. Hugged close to him inside the coat was the small mongrel dog named Mutt.

Presently Spots found the number he was looking for. He glanced furtively around and hurried up the steps. Inside the foyer, he paused to look back at the street to make sure he had not been followed. Seeing no one, he turned quickly to the bank of mailboxes and located the one with the name Lena on it. Cory had been afraid he would forget the name, but he had not. He had repeated it over and over again to himself on the way from the poolroom. He knew how important it was that he do exactly as Cory had told him to do. He knew that Cory was depending on him. He would not let his friend down. Cory would see. Cory would be proud of him.

The dog under his coat began whimpering and Spots whispered gently to it to keep still. In the half-light of the hallway, he fumbled with the cover of Lena Fuller's mailbox and it came open, just like Cory had said it would. Inside he found a thick sealed envelope. There would be fifteen hundred dollars in the envelope, like Cory had said. Spots stuffed the envelope in a deep coat pocket and left the building.

A moment later he was hurrying down the street toward the subway.

Cory watched until Spots was out of sight, then turned away from the window. Lena Fuller was drinking coffee at a small table just outside her Pullman kitchen.

"My pal got the money okay," Cory said to her. "He'll be back at midnight, so I'll only be in your way a few more hours."

The girl said nothing. Cory walked over and sat down opposite her. There was a movie fan magazine on the table. He idly thumbed through it.

"You like movies?" he asked easily. She parted her lips but as usual did not speak, merely nodded. Cory had yet to hear her voice. She's still scared, he thought. He determined to ease her discomfort.

"I used to like movies a lot," he said. "Who's your favorite star?" Let's see her answer that with a nod, he thought. He waited a moment but she did not answer at all. "I used to like Jimmy Cagney," he continued. "You know, those old gangster pictures. Come on now, who do you like?"

She looked up, slowly, clutching the coffee cup in both hands. "I—I guess I like Gregory Peck best," she said softly.

Cory smiled at her. "You see," he said, "I ain't so hard to talk to, now am I?"

A brief smile flicked over Lena Fuller's lips and her face seemed to soften. She shook her head once. "Would—you like some coffee?" she asked hesitantly.

"That'd be swell," Cory said, smiling wider.

She got up for another cup. Cory pushed the magazine aside. He took a stiletto from his pocket and flicked it open. When the girl came back to the table, he was carefully trimming a fingernail with the deadly blade. She poured his coffee, glancing fearfully at the knife.

"Nothin' to be afraid of," he said easily. "It's just a kind of pocket knife. Lots of guys carry pocket knives. I'll put it away if it bothers you."

"Why do you?" she asked impulsively.

"Huh? Why do I what?"

"Carry a knife like that? And that gun?"

Cory shrugged. He closed the stiletto and put it away. "I dunno. I don't usually carry the gun around. The knife—well, I dunno, I guess I just feel better with it. I know how to use it pretty well. I can throw it real good; split an apple at fifty feet." The girl was looking at him curiously again. He suddenly felt embarrassed. Lifting the cup, he sipped some of the coffee. "This is good coffee," he said in an attempt to change the subject.

As Lena Fuller was about to sit back down, her phone rang. She looked over at the instrument, then back at Cory. It rang again.

"Go ahead," he said. "Just watch what you say."

She walked over and picked up the receiver. "Hello—"

Cory sat watching her, listening to her end of the conversation.

"No, I don't think you'd better tonight," she said to her caller.

Cory glanced at the clock on the kitchen wall. It was five before eight. Four more hours, he thought.

"Well, because I'm tired, that's why," Lena Fuller said into the phone. Her voice was becoming nervous. Cory watched her closely.

"I just don't want you to, Johnny. I just don't."

Boyfriend, Cory thought. She's putting him off. He hoped the guy wouldn't get sore at her. Finding a boyfriend probably wasn't the easiest thing in the world for a girl like her. She was so—well, plain. But she was nice, just the same, he decided. Funny, but he couldn't remember ever having met a really nice girl before. He had to admit that he was impressed. He was even beginning to admire Lena Fuller a little.

"No," he heard her say now. "I'm sorry. No. All right, goodbye."

She put the receiver back and sighed heavily. Returning to the table, she sat down and stared intently at her cup of coffee.

"I, uh—I'm sorry to spoil your evening like this," Cory said self-consciously. "I hope your boyfriend won't be too sore."

She shook her head slowly, still staring down at the black pool of coffee. "He can always stay home

with his wife tonight," she said bitterly.

Cory frowned deeply, his mouth dropping open an inch. He stared at the girl in disbelief.

A card game was in progress in the garage of Slick's used car lot when Spots got there. Slick, the owner, looked up from his hand when he saw Spots in the doorway. "What do you want, punk?" he asked disdainfully.

"I wanna buy a car," Spots said, swallowing hard. A couple of the players looked up from the table and laughed softly. Slick grunted loudly.

"I suppose you want to use that flea-bitten hound of yours for a trade-in," he said derisively.

Spots pulled his coat around Mutt protectively. "I ain't kidding," he said, "I wanna get a car. I got dough, look." He held out a roll of bills for Slick to see. A hush settled over the table. Slick's eyes widened at the size of the roll. He got up at once, throwing in his hand.

"Sure, Spots, sure," he grinned. "I thought you was putting me on. Come on out on the lot, I'll show you what I got."

Slick led Spots out of the garage. Two of the other card players got up and followed them. They were big men dressed in suits and snap-brim hats. One of them had a knife scar across his cheek. They stopped just outside the garage door and

watched Slick show Spots a three-year-old Mercury.

"That's the creep that always tags after Irish Ahearn, ain't it?" said the man with the scar.

"Yeah."

"Wonder where he got the roll?"

The other man shook his head. "Beats me. What's the latest word on Ahearn?"

"Still holed up somewhere. He's in a tight bind. Must be getting pretty edgy by now. Probably looking for a way out of town."

"Yeah. Probably looking for a car."

"Come on," said the scarfaced man. They walked over to the Mercury Spots was looking at.

"Go on back to the game, Slick," the scarfaced man said. "We wanna talk to Spots."

Slick started to object, thinking about the roll Spots had; but then he remembered that the two men in front of him worked for Spanish Sam, one of the minor gang bosses in the district. And it was a well known fact that Spanish Sam was a man of violent temper when anyone got in his way. So Slick merely shrugged and returned to the garage.

"There's a guy we want you to talk to, Spots," said the scarfaced man, taking Spots by the arm.

"Yeah," said his partner, "maybe we can do you a favor. Come on."

They led Spots to a car parked at the curb. The scarred man drove. His partner sat in back with Spots.

Cory Ahearn crushed out a cigarette and immediately lighted another one. "Look," he said flatly to Lena Fuller, "you don't owe me any explanations. You never saw me before a few hours ago, and a few hours from now I'll be gone and you'll never see me again. Why don't you just forget it?"

"You were disappointed when I told you," she accused matter-of-factly. "I could see it in your face. It—it made me feel cheap, the way you looked at me."

Cory shrugged. He got up and walked over to the window. "I was just—surprised," he said. "Anyway, so what? You're nothing to me. What do I care what you do?"

Lena Fuller followed him to the window. She stood facing his back. "Turn around," she said. He turned to face her. "Look at me. Do you think I'm pretty? Do you?"

Cory shrugged again. He did not answer her.

"No, I'm not," she answered for him. "I'm plain and I'm homely and I don't know how to dress or how to act or—"

Suddenly she was in tears, sobbing into her own palms and she hid her face from him. Cory stood looking at her, not knowing what to do. He bit his lip and glanced at the clock. Five past nine. Less than three hours to go. He sighed heavily, wondering what to say, what to do. Finally he reached out and touched her shoulder gently.

"Why don't you come sit down,"

he said. "I'll make us some more coffee."

Later, when she had stopped crying, they sat together on the couch drinking fresh coffee. Cory listened quietly while she told him about it.

"Johnny's wife used to work in the same office I work in. She was my best girlfriend. After she got married, I used to have dinner at their apartment sometimes. Johnny would drive me home afterwards. There was nothing at all to it; we were all just friends. Then one night they had a fight about something and he walked out. He came over here. He said he just wanted to talk; he said he didn't have anyone else to talk to. And that's all we did, just talk."

The girl paused and let her head rest back against the couch. She closed her eyes. Cory sat looking down at the floor, saying nothing. He knew what was coming. It was an old story. Simple girl, sharp guy. Life is rotten all over, he thought. Nobody gets an even break. Not even poor homely square Lena Fuller.

"Of course, he went back to his wife that night," the girl continued. "But after that he would come around and take me to lunch, or just be in the neighborhood and drop by; things like that. He started getting friendlier and friendlier, more familiar. He was nice. He paid attention to me. He made me think I was—well, something be-

sides what I am. And I fell for it."

Lena Fuller sighed heavily and opened her eyes. "Now it's every Thursday night. He's supposed to be bowling; but he comes here." She looked pleadingly at Cory. "I want to stop; I just don't know how."

"Sure," said Cory, nodding. "I've felt that way about things myself."

"What did you do?" she asked eagerly. "How did you stop doing what you didn't want to do?"

Cory shrugged. "I don't know. Different ways. You just gotta learn to hold your head up. You gotta let people know you're as good as they are. You got to—"

The telephone rang again, interrupting him. Cory stared at the girl, waiting for her to speak.

"It's him again," she said, and added soberly, "Nobody else ever calls."

"Answer it," said Cory. He continued to stare at her. She felt as if his eyes had stripped her to the soul. "If you really want to be rid of this guy," he challenged, "then let him come up right now and tell him so."

Lena Fuller met his stare openly with one of her own. And without hesitation, she also met his challenge. Wordlessly she walked over to the phone and picked it up.

"Hello—yes, Johnny—all right then, come on up if you want to, but I don't think you're going to enjoy yourself—all right, fifteen minutes—yes—goodbye."

She hung up and turned back to Cory. Her face was determined now, almost bold. Cory smiled and stood up. He unzipped his wind-breaker.

"Take off your shoes and stockings," he told Lena Fuller.

Spanish Sam was fat and greasy. Even in his silk shirt and Italian suit he was fat and greasy. Fat, greasy—and extremely dangerous.

He faced Spots across his desk in the back room of the Havana Club. He was becoming very impatient with the ragged punk who sat clutching a filthy mongrel dog under his coat.

"Now look, Spots," he said in forced friendliness, "you ain't doing yourself no good trying to help Black Irish at a time like this. He's all finished now, you gotta understand that. He's already dead, see, he just ain't laid down yet. He killed a copper, Spots. Now you ain't so dumb you don't know what that means."

The fat hoodlum paused to study Spots' reaction. There was none. Spots merely sat and stared at him dumbly. Sam felt sweat break out under his collar. His patience was nearly exhausted.

"Tell us where he is, Spots," Spanish Sam said, making a final effort to do it the easy way. "Tell us and we'll relieve him of the rest of the stickup money before the cops get to him. We'll cut you in for a share. What do you say?"

Spots did not answer. He reached under his coat and stroked Mutt's shaggy head. He knew what they would do to him but he did not care. Cory was his friend. Cory had even named his dog. He wouldn't rat on Cory, no matter what.

Spots remained silent. Spanish Sam exploded in rage. "Break his fingers!" he ordered the scar-faced man.

Spots felt one arm being twisted behind the chair, felt one of his fingers being bent backwards. Tears came to his eyes and he moaned in pain. But he did not speak. With his free hand he hugged Mutt to him protectively.

The finger broke with a sickening snap of bone and Spots' face drained of color. But still he did not speak. The scar-faced hood found his next finger.

"Wait," said Spanish Sam. He looked oddly at Spots for a moment, then smiled a cruel, knowing smile. "Leave him be," he ordered. "Break the dog's legs instead."

Mutt was torn out of Spots' frantic grasp. The mongrel whimpered in terror. Spots flung himself to his knees before Spanish Sam's desk.

"Please don't!" he begged. "Don't hurt Mutt! Please don't—"

"Where's Ahearn?" Spanish Sam asked coldly.

Spots did not answer. Spanish Sam nodded to the scar-faced man and a second later Spots heard the dog yelp in pain.

"Okay!" Spots screamed, tears streaking his cheeks. "I'll tell!"

Lena Fuller opened her apartment door to admit a handsome, well-dressed young man with an engaging smile.

"Hello, Johnny," she said.

Johnny reached out to put his arm around her, but his hand stopped in mid-air. The smile on his face dissolved into a surprised pout when he saw Cory Ahearn stretched out on the couch.

"You didn't tell me you had company," he said stiffly, glancing down at the girl's bare feet.

"You didn't ask me, did you?" she said pointedly. "You just took it for granted I'd be alone and available, didn't you?"

Johnny ignored the remark and turned to Cory. "I don't believe I know you, do I?" he said, turning on an imitation smile.

Cory grunted. "Not hardly," he answered.

The man's mouth tightened but he said nothing. He turned to Lena again. "I didn't think you'd be busy," he said in a pained voice, "not tonight anyway."

"Lots of people are busy on Thursday nights," Cory interrupted from the couch. He sat up and lighted a cigarette. "People do all sorts of things on Thursday nights. Some people even go bowling."

Johnny flushed deeply. "Look," he snapped, "if you don't mind, I'd like to talk to Lena alone."

Cory stood up. "Suppose I do mind?" he said flatly.

"What's your interest here anyway?" Johnny demanded.

"Whatever it is, it's better than yours," Cory told him. "It's not a Thursday-night-only interest."

Johnny blushed red again. He turned back toward the girl. "I'm disappointed in you, Lena," he said in a superior voice. "I thought you were above this—this sort of thing."

Cory grunted again, louder this time, making no effort to conceal his disgust of the visitor. "Brother, how phoney can you get," he muttered.

"Now, listen you—" Johnny began.

"No, you listen," Lena Fuller cut him off in an icy voice, "and listen good! You know, this is really the first time I've ever taken a good close look at you; the first time I've ever really had the chance to compare you with anyone else. And I don't like what I see. I don't like it at all."

"Lena—"

"No, Johnny. No more nice words. No more of your smiles and personality. I've had enough. As of right now, just forget you know me. Forget where I live. Forget my phone number. Find someplace else to go on Thursday nights. This bowling alley is closed—permanently. Do you understand me, Johnny?"

"You really mean it, Lena?" Johnny asked, shocked.

"Yes, I do," she answered, holding her head a little higher than usual.

"You're doing this for someone like *him*?" he asked incredulously, pointing to Cory.

"He's a man, Johnny," she replied evenly. "He's a man and he's honest. You're neither."

Johnny looked scornfully at her. "Who needs you," he said cruelly. He stepped back to the door and slammed out of the apartment.

Cory and the girl faced each other in the sudden, heavy silence. After a moment, Cory smiled slightly and said, "I, uh—I was kind of proud of you."

"I'm glad," she said. "I don't think I could have done it if you hadn't been here." She looked over at the clock. It was nearly ten. "You only have two more hours."

"Yeah."

"I know I'm not very pretty—"

"You're pretty to me," Cory said. "Honest, you are."

She smiled. "Somehow, I feel pretty with you."

She walked barefoot over to the couch where he waited.

At five minutes before midnight, Cory had his windbreaker on again. It was zipped up snug around his neck. The rest of the holdup money was stuffed in his pockets. The .38 was tucked back in his waistband.

The apartment was dark. Cory peered intently out the window,

watching the alley entrance across the street. Behind him in the room, the girl Lena was curled up on the couch, sleeping.

Cory cupped his hands around a match and lighted a cigarette. The glare of the flame made the girl stir restlessly. A moment later she woke up. She pulled a sweater around her shoulders and came over to stand next to him.

"Where will you go?" she asked after a moment.

"I don't know yet," he answered. "Will you ever come back?"

"No. I won't be able to." He stared down at the glowing cigarette. "I guess I won't ever be able to do anything again," he added quietly, "except hide out."

"I could go with you," she suggested. "I could help you drive."

"You're crazy," he said, dismissing the idea as ridiculous.

Lena Fuller looked down at the faintly grey window sill. "Then you didn't mean all those things you said a little while ago. You didn't mean them at all. You're just like—like—"

"That's a lie!" he said sharply, cutting her off. She fell silent for a long moment.

"I'm sorry," she said at last. "I didn't mean it."

"Forget it," he told her. Just then, across the street, a pair of automobile headlights blinked on and off again in a split second. "I gotta go," Cory said. He held out his hand to her, meaning only to

touch her gently one last time; but she rushed into his arms. She clung to him frantically. A sob tore itself from her throat. He could feel her warm tears against his face.

"Promise you'll write me," she cried. "Promise you'll let me know where you are. Promise me."

In the grey light cast through the window, Cory could see a sick pleading in the girl's face. It was a crazy thing she was asking of him. A crazy thing she was trying to do. Everything about it, about him and her, all of it—was crazy. Yet he could not refuse her.

"I promise," he whispered.

Then he pulled away from her and moved across the dark room, leaving her alone at the window. He quickly left the apartment.

Brief moments later, Cory made his way cautiously across the deserted street and entered the alley. A black sedan waited there for him. He hurried around to the driver's side. From behind the wheel, Spots peered out at him fearfully.

"Good work, Spots—" Cory began. His words were cut off then as a blackjack slammed down across his shoulders like a falling tree. Instinctively he whirled around, reaching for his gun. A second blow smashed against his cheek, knocking him across the car fender. A blinding red light splashed inside his head. Groggily he threw a fist at his unseen attacker; he struck only air. An in-

stant later a heavy foot caught him low in the stomach and he sank to his knees. Vainly he fought to stay conscious; but he could not. He pitched forward into blackness.

When Cory came to his senses again, he was back in Lena Fuller's apartment, lying on the couch with a cold, wet towel being held against his face. His vision focused through the pounding in his head and he looked up to see the girl bending over him.

"How'd you get me up here?" he asked thickly, his face expanding with pain.

"I saw you stagger out of the alley. I came down and helped you."

"I walked?" he asked incredulously.

"Yes."

Cory shook his head drunkenly. He did not remember it. The last thing clear in his mind was when he fell on his face in the alley. He thought of Spots.

"He crossed me. The one guy I thought I could trust—and he crossed me." Cory pushed up on his elbows, grimacing at the pain in his stomach. "What time is it?"

"After two."

He sat all the way up. "I got to get out of here."

"They took your money," she told him, "and your gun."

He stared at her in disbelief, then felt his pockets and searched for his gun. He found nothing. He slumped back against the couch.

"Great. No gun, no money, no car. No nothing."

"Now you'll have to let me help you," Lena Fuller said confidently. "You need me now."

"I need you all right," Cory admitted, "but I won't let you help me."

"You've got to. There's nothing else you can do."

"Look," Cory said sharply, "you don't know what you're talking about. I was in on a stickup that went sour. A cop was killed. You could get twenty years just for what you've done already."

"I don't care," she said defiantly.

"Well, I do," he snapped. "I said no and that's that. Forget it."

Lena's eyes grew moist. "But you need me," she said in a choking voice. "You're the only one who's ever needed me—for myself. I want to help you."

"There's no way you can help me," Cory said softly. "Try to understand that."

"There is, there is," she replied quickly, seizing at the chance to prove it to him. "I have some money saved; we can use that. We can leave together in the morning, when everyone is going to work. We'd be just another couple walking to the subway. When we got downtown we could catch a train or a bus. In a few hours we'd be far away. All this would be behind us."

Cory stared at her intently. It might work, he thought. Just an-

other couple walking to the subway. There'd be cops at the bus depot but she could buy the tickets and—

Yeah, it just might work.

"We wouldn't have to stay together when it was over," she said with eyes downcast. "You wouldn't have to keep me with you if you didn't want to."

He knew he should say no. By all that was right, he should say no. But he could not. He reached up and took her hand and pulled her to the floor in front of him.

"I'd want you with me," he said. "I'd want us to stay together."

"Then let me help you," she pleaded. "Please, let me—"

Sobs cut off her words. She buried her face against his legs and cried, clinging to him desperately. Cory stroked her hair with a gentle hand.

"All right," he said.

They were still sitting that way, quietly, without having spoken another word, an hour later when the first searchlight streaked through the window and filled the room with an eerie silver glow.

The girl sat up in fright, drawing her breath in sharply. Cory froze, his blood turning cold. Seconds later a raspy voice came grinding through an electric megaphone.

"CORY AHEARN! THIS IS THE POLICE! WE HAVE YOU SURROUNDED! THERE ARE OFFICERS IN EVERY APART-

MENT IN THE BUILDING! THERE ARE OFFICERS ON THE ROOF AND IN THE BASEMENT! THERE ARE POLICE ON ALL SIDES OF YOU! THERE IS NO WAY FOR YOU TO ESCAPE! YOU HAVE FIVE MINUTES TO GIVE YOURSELF UP OR WE WILL COME IN AFTER YOU! REPEAT—CORY AHEARN, YOU ARE COMPLETELY SURROUNDED—"

Cory darted to the window and peered out against the near-blinding light. He could see police cars lining the street, shadowy figures moving back and forth. He could see a mob of people on the opposite sidewalk, being held in check by a police cordon. His throat went suddenly dry and began to tighten. He whirled and hurried into Lena Fuller's tiny kitchen. From that window, he saw the same things—men, cars, spotlights. A dread settled over him. He was trapped. From outside, the static voice continued its deadly warning.

"—FIVE MINUTES TO GIVE YOURSELF UP OR BE TAKEN BY FORCE—"

Cory walked slowly back into the living room. The girl was still on the floor by the couch. Her face was drawn with fright, her tightly clenched fists pressed against her ears to shut out the terrible threatening voice.

Cory lighted a cigarette with trembling hands. There was no

way to run, no way to fight—nothing. If the girl weren't with him, he'd let them come in and get him. At least that way they couldn't say he gave up. They couldn't say he turned yellow. But she *was* with him, and he had to protect her as best he could, so—

So nothing. It was over.

"—FOUR MINUTES, AHEARN!" the electric voice said.

He moved across the room and stood next to her. "I've got to go on out there," he said matter-of-factly. "Just tell them I forced my way in. You'll be okay."

He started away from her. She got up and rushed after him. She caught him at the door and closed her arms around him in panic. Her whole body shook, violently. She tried to speak to him but could not. He stood holding her for what seemed like a very long time—but was really only seconds, brief seconds.

"THREE MINUTES, AHEARN, THREE MINUTES!" the voice warned.

Cory pulled her arms from around him. "I've got to go."

"They'll kill you," she said in an agony-strained voice.

"Not if I do what they say," he told her. He knew it was a lie. They *would* kill him. Maybe not tonight with bullets, but a few months from now, another way. Now or then, they meant to have him dead. And they would. But she did not realize that.

"I like you, Lena," he said quietly. "I like you better than any girl I ever knew. For the first time in my life I wish things had been different."

He opened the door and stepped into the hall. At the stairway he stopped and looked back. She was following him with her eyes, face in anguish, sobbing uncontrollably. Cory forced a smile.

"It'll be all right," he told her. "You find yourself a nice guy, you hear? Stay away from the phonies. Okay?"

She nodded and managed to force a little smile of her own.

"So long, Lena."

Cory started down the stairs.

"TWO MINUTES, AHEARN!"

Cory stopped in the first floor foyer and peered out at the street. Squad cars, searchlight trucks, uniforms, the mob of curious people waiting to see the cop-killer. What did they expect he wondered. A scared, shaking little punk begging for mercy? Cory smiled to himself. If that's what they expected, they were going to be badly disappointed. He was Cory Ahearn. He had a reputation to live up to. He'd walk out there like he owned them all. Straightening his shoulders, he reached for the door.

"Cory—" a voice behind him hissed.

He whirled around and saw Spots crouched in the corner. Instinctively his hand went into his

pocket and came out with the stiletto. Its thin blade flashed open at a touch of his thumb.

"You crossed me, Spots," Cory accused coldly.

"No, Cory, no," the little man pleaded. He pulled a soiled handkerchief from his hand and held up his twisted finger for Cory to see. "It was Spanish Sam, Cory. He broke my finger. He made me tell, Cory. He was gonna break Mutt's leg. I couldn't stand that, Cory. I couldn't stand to see him hurt Mutt."

Cory stood with the knife poised, his eyes piercing into Spots' eyes, his mind weighing each word. He was deciding life and death.

"It was Spanish Sam that tipped the cops," Spots said, "after they mugged you in the alley. I wanted to stay and help you, but they wouldn't let me."

"ONE MORE MINUTE, AHEARN!" the booming voice outside warned.

"I'm sorry, Cory," Spots cried. "I'm sorry I got you hung up."

Cory closed the knife. "Forget it, Spots," he said. "I got myself hung up; a long time ago." He punched the little man lightly on the arm. Then he noticed that the front of Spots' coat was flat. "Where's the mutt?" he asked. Spots turned his head away sadly.

"Spanish Sam killed him anyway."

Cory sighed heavily. There was nothing he could say. Spots would

be all alone now. No words on earth could lighten that burden.

"Take it easy, Spots," Cory said softly.

"YOUR TIME'S UP, AHEARN! WHAT ABOUT IT?"
Cory opened the door a few inches. "I'm coming out!" he yelled. "I ain't got a gun!"

He raised his closed hands over his head and kicked the door open wide. Spotlights flooded him as he stepped onto the porch. He started slowly down the steps. He stumbled once but quickly regained his balance. He stopped.

"I can't see!" he said loudly.

The lights were lowered to his shoulders and he started moving again. His eyes focused quickly and he looked around. In front of him a line of six policemen waited, riot guns held ready. Just behind them was the human cordon of blue uniforms holding the spectators in check. The people formed a sea of faces that swam before Cory's eyes. He felt suddenly nauseous and stopped again.

Slowly, as he stood there, his mind cleared and the blur stopped moving and settled into individual faces again. Cory stared at them for a second; a few he recognized, most he did not. His eyes swept over the crowd. Mostly strangers—except for one. His gaze halted and remained fixed on one face, one person. Cory's eyes narrowed, his face hardened. Standing at the edge of the crowd was Spanish Sam.

At the sight of the fat hoodlum, Cory unconsciously clenched his raised hands tighter. It was then that he realized he still held the closed stiletto in one fist. A cold smile broke over his lips. He started walking again.

Spanish Sam's greasy face came closer and closer. Spanish Sam, who had killed Spots' dog. Spanish Sam, who had stolen Cory's money and gun. Spanish Sam, who without knowing it had made Lena Fuller cry. Spanish Sam, who had informed to the police and by so doing had ended Cory's life. Spanish Sam. He was grinning as Cory moved closer to the line of policemen.

Then Cory was close enough.

His thumb moved and the blade sprang out. Cory swung his arm in an arch, snapped his wrist suddenly—and sent the stiletto hurling through the air.

The six policemen fired at once. Their bullets tore into Cory Ahearn just as the stiletto plunged deep into Spanish Sam's throat. Both men tumbled into the street.

Spanish Sam died first.

A few hours later, at daybreak, all was quiet again.

Nothing was left of Cory Ahearn now except a bloodstain in the street. And two people to mourn him.

Spots sat on the curb, all alone, tears streaking his mute face. Nothing, he thought over and over. Nothing—and nobody.

Three stories above him, Lena Fuller stood dry-eyed at her window. She could cry no more; sorrow had drained her. So quickly, she thought. It had come and gone so quickly. She had been a shell, filled for a few brief hours with new life, then torn empty and left to—what? Only desolation.

She sighed and looked down at

the man sitting on the curb. Was he also crying? It looked like he was. She wondered why. Perhaps for the same reason that she had cried? Perhaps for—him.

Lena Fuller left her apartment and started downstairs. Maybe she could help the man on the curb. Maybe he could even help her.

Maybe.



FINDERS KEEPERS . . .

BY B. A. CODY

Ralph had a real problem with his no-good brother, Jake.

JAKE LANTZ slouched up the grimy sidewalk, a smoking cigarette dangling from his top lip. He saw O'Leary coming at him down the block. This didn't bother him, a day can't be all good.

The only thing he'd lifted today was that fiv'er out of brother Ralphies car. "Ol' Ralphies gettin' mighty careless, leaving' bills around under ol' paper bags," he thought. A grin spread through Jake, but only the ghost of it reached his sagging mouth.

He was faintly surprised to see the copper step in front of him. Jake stopped moving and fastened his gaze on a point just beyond O'Learys' left ear.

"Hi Jake, where you been?"

"Like nowhere man, movin' air."

A patrol car eased up behind him, Jakes' eyes slid around to it without moving his head.

"I've got nothin' burnin' me O'Leary," he sneered.

"Good." O'Leary moved in to do a routine frisk. He came up with a cheap wrist watch, the price band still on it.

"Hummm," he turned it over in his hand and stared hard at Jake. "Funny thing, Hardman over on third's been screaming all over the station about a clean out on these."

Jake shuffled his feet and shoved his hands in his pockets. Porky Harris slipped him the watch a couple hours ago. Payment on a loan. He'd forgot all about it.

"Never set a pad on third today man."

"Where'd you get it?"

Jake rotated his shoulders, "Holdin' it for a friend."

"What friend?"

Jake let his eyes stop a minute on O'Learys before they crossed over to study a point just beyond the coppers right ear. The conversation was ended, and they both knew it.

An elderly black coupe glided to a stop behind the patrol car, the bang of the door brought it to Jakes attention.

Ralph Lantz bounced up enthusiastically, bright and grinning. Ralph had a blue eyed innocent look about him that just didn't be-

long in this weedy, seedy, hopeless neighborhood.

Acquaintances invariably said the same thing about Ralph Lantz. . . . "He's smart, he's going places." He'd been on his way home from work, to clean up for night school, when he spotted his brother and the cop. There were still traces of ink on the hand that reached out and gripped Jake's arm.

He threw O'Leary a grinning salute.

"How's the printer's apprentice?" O'Leary wanted to know.

Ralph nodded, "Great, just great thanks. Trouble?" he asked, looking from the uniformed man to his brother.

Jake shrugged and looked off across the street. It was shameful having a brother who'd buddy up to a cop.

O'Leary gave Ralph a friendly, sympathetic glance. "You seen this watch before?" he asked, dangling it out in front of him.

Ralph didn't move to touch it, one hand stayed on his brother's arm, the other slid absently into his pocket. He studied it, and shook his head.

"It's probably lifted from Hardman's. Jake had it."

Ralph turned and looked at his brother. The smile was gone, without it the innocent blue eyes iced up. "Can't you keep out of trouble?" he asked coldly.

Jake returned his brother's glare. "Take your foot off the gas good

boy, they're drivin' a blind street," he snarled, shook his arm free and slouched over to the patrol car.

Jake was not afraid of violence, it was the total lack of it when Ralph went cold and quiet that made the animal instincts Jake lived by send him panicy danger signals.

Ralph helpfully slammed the door of the police car behind O'Leary. "I'll follow you," he said, going back to his car.

Jake stared down at his hands, he wished Ralph would keep out of it. Ralph just didn't belong. The cops belonged, he belonged. They were on different sides of the fence, but they had business together. Ralph was an outsider and Jake wanted to keep it that way, not because he liked his brother, more because he hated his guts!

Hardman looked down at the watch. "That's one of mine!" He turned and stared at Jake. I didn't see him, but that's my goods."

"Where'd you get it boy?" the detective asked.

Jake turned over a couple of answers in his mind, but knew it'd be quicker to just clam.

Hardman, the detective, Ralph and Jake listened to the clock tick through a silent ten seconds.

"Look," Ralph pleaded, "I know Jake didn't steal that watch. Mr. Hardman, will you drop the charges on Jake if we just buy the watch? That'd be even better than getting it back wouldn't it?"

A calculating look came into the pudgy little jewelers eye. "Can't you make him talk?" he asked the detective.

The detective shrugged.

Hardman turned back to Ralph, and looked at Jake. "The watch is twenty dollars."

Jake snorted at the crooked little man, "Like twelve man, like twelve say the price on the thing!"

The jeweler fidgeted, the three other men stared silently at him.

"There'll have to be a claim and recovery report filed before the watch leaves our hands." the detective informed Hardman.

"You'll drop the charges, if we buy the watch?" Ralph persisted.

The jeweler jerked his head up and down. "List price, twelve dollars."

Ralph dug around his pockets and came up with a ten and some change. Not enough.

"Got any money Jake?"

Jake grinned. "Like yeah man, picked up a fin today. Somebody make it smaller?"

Hardman fished around his pockets and shook his head.

The detective sighed and pulled out his own worn wallet.

Jake leaned across and put the crisp new bill on his desk, under the light. The detective glanced at it, then stared hard, whistled, picked it up and turned it over.

"Where'd you get this Jake?" he asked softly.

Jake lounged back, grinning, "Found it man, right under the seat of ol' brother Ralphie's car." He glanced at his brother, and what he saw made the smile run off his face fast.

Ralph's lips were drawn white against his teeth as he sucked air, relieving the shock that hit him. "You're too dumb to be a crook Jake boy."

"Where'd you get it Ralph?" the detective wanted to know, still softly.

Ralph forced a grin and moved back once again behind that bland, innocent look. "Why sargent," he said, matching the policeman's easy tone, "I made it."

The cop nodded, holding the bill up to the light. "We've been kinda' wondering who it was!"





376924892
Island Paradise
Ossining, New York

Dear Gert,

Look, I'm telling you. Get Shyster Sam off my back. I don't want no appeal . . . I don't want no parole . . . I don't want to get sprung . . . period!

I read this piece in Manhunt Magazine, and now I'm making book up here like there was no tomorrow. I'm already into the Warden for three hundred clams.

Now do like I tell you. Scratch Sam. Get me a lifetime subscription to Manhunt. And send me the Green Sheet every week in a plain wrapper.

Your sure thing,
'Louie

P.S.

See inside back cover.

VEGAS



A Novel

BY DON LOWRY

They took the Vegas gambling houses for one hundred "Gs" . . . and then they ran.

GOOD MORNING, Mr. Jarvis, Mr. Morton and a Happy New Year to you—Mrs. Jarvis, Mrs. Morton. You both look so charming. How did you leave Hollywood?"

"It seems, from the crowd here in the lobby tonight, that all Hollywood's here, Drake," I replied to the Thunderbird's assistant manager, as I nodded casually to un-

known faces in the gala New Year's Eve crowd, "and a good New Year to you—not, however, I hope, at our expense."

The swank Las Vegas strip hotel's greeter quipped and bantered suavely with us as he smoothly expedited our registering for two adjoining suites and gave us the important guest treatment—spring-

VEGAS . . . and run



ing from a post-reservation credit rating investigation of the genuine E. M. Jarvis and R. C. Morton, two movieland executives whom we were impersonating. Our own *pre*-reservation investigation had checked out the two Hollywood executives just as thoroughly and we knew not only their triple A Dun and Bradstreet rating but also

that the two men and their wives were aboard the Jarvis yacht on a South Pacific cruise that New Year's Eve.

From the V.I.P. reception I had a feeling we were "in" and that we had made no slip-up so far.

But unlike other holidaying couples, we switched roles the minute the bellhops left the suites.

"Grace and Jean—take your bags into the other suite and get dressed. Larry and I have work to do before we start out," I told the girls who were posing as our "wives". This wasn't a New Year's Eve party for us. Instead it was strictly business—a hundred thousand dollar's worth. The girls were Hollywood extras, hired with a story that we were gamblers who needed them for a front in a professional, but legitimate, gambling raid on the strip casinos. They had the appearance and the mink to play the roles and the role-playing was all we asked of them. Paid cash-on-the-line in advance, they agreed to come along for the act with an understanding that they could walk out the minute there was any "funny stuff". We were out to take the casino operators in a counterfeiting switch—not to seduce a couple of middle-aged actresses.

"OK, Larry, let's get with it—we have ten hours to take ten casinos for ten G's apiece."

"And so far it looks good, Billy—like the script says," smiled Larry.

I laughed when I looked up at him from my own dressing.

"What's funny, jokester?"

"You look like a prosperous businessman in that dinner jacket. The boys back in Leavenworth wouldn't recognize you."

"Drop the stir talk, Bill, those two broads have ears and they can get curious."

"You got a point," I admitted as I unlocked the attache case with the queer traveler's checks. "Here they are for the first stop."

I locked the case back up again and carefully locked it back inside a Gladstone bag. It still held ninety thousand dollars in counterfeited traveler's checks and we didn't want a snooping maid or house dick admiring our offset work.

"It's been a long road, Larry," I said to my former cell mate, "and if we don't run into a rumble tonight it will be a plush one from now on."

"As I said like the script—and there'll be no rumble. Be careful what you say in front of those two broads. We need them for a front but we don't want them blowing the whistle on us. All set? We stop for champagne before we go into our act—like the rest of the crowd here tonight, we're on a holiday."

"I'll get the broads."

Jean and Grace, looked the part and the real Mr. Jarvis and Mr. Morton would have been proud of them in their roles of wives for the night. For a moment I contemplated what they had termed "funny stuff" if we had time and the thought of blowing this caper for a romp on the bedsheets shocked me back to reality. I knocked on the girls' door.

"Ready, Jean—Grace?"

"And waiting," quipped my "wife," Jean.

"Just a minute, Bill, I want to

get the girls straight once more on their act."

Larry had felt from the beginning the one weak part of our entire plan was the wife act and he wanted to be sure.

"I'll run it down to you girls again so you'll know your script before the action starts."

I lit cigarettes for the girls as Larry made like a set director.

"First, as we explained in L.A., we're professional gamblers and we can only get the action we want if the operators here remain in the dark on that point. We're posing as Hollywood businessmen and you're playing the role of our wives. No tricks; no gimmicks; and nothing illegal—so there's no chance of trouble for you. I'm E.M. 'Ernie' Jarvis and Bill's R.C. 'Bob' Morton. Grace, you're Mrs. Jarvis and Jean, you're Mrs. Morton. Play it that way for the rest of the evening. All you have to do is act like impatient wives of well-heeled businessmen who want to gamble while you want to party it up for the holiday and get on to see the sights at another hotel. But the only time you 'want to get on to another hotel' is when we give you the signal—with the handkerchief wiping the forehead. Keep to the script and there's a G note bonus for both of you. Any questions?"

"Nope. Just an observation."

"What's that, Grace?"

"You look good enough to be a husband, darling."

"Thank's baby," quipped Larry, "but this is strictly business tonight. We'll party some other time."

"I've got it straight," was Jean's uncommunicative reply.

"We'll join the partying crowd in the lounge. Like champagne, Jean?" I asked my "wife".

"Love it, Mr. Morton."

The girls were naturals for their parts, fitting into the game as if they'd been in on its planning back in the penitentiary cell at Leavenworth.

"Nice to have you with us, Mr. Morton. Good evening, Mr. Jarvis—Mrs. Morton, Mrs. Jarvis. Happy New Year," was the head waiter's welcome. How the genial and very professional Swiss came up with the names was beyond conception and as he led us to a reserved table I marvelled at the smooth operation of the hotel on a crowded New Year's Eve. I hoped the security system of its cashier's department was less efficient in its operation.

While Larry and the "wives" made like typical holidaying guests, I sipped the imported champagne and let my mind wander back to the eight-man cell in the federal bigtop where tonight's caper had originated.

Both Larry and I had been well versed in the counterfeit racket. We'd served three bits for making queer and each time were scooped by Treasury agents who traced us through pushers who bought queer

from us and did the canary act to cut their own time when they were knocked off. We'd never worked together before but a Los Angeles fence brought us together in Leavenworth. George Zakaras was one of the more careful L.A. fences and I'd been surprised to find him inside the walls in the federal bigtop.

"Billy Mortell! I heard you were back," was his greeting when I ran into him on the big yard after getting out of quarantine.

"Hi, George. How'd Uncle Whiskers get you east of the Rockies?"

"They said I shipped some hot furs across the state line, Billy."

"You appealing?"

"Yeah, I got 'em in Circuit Court now but I'll probably spring before I get a hearing. I'm only doing a nickel."

"Hope you make it, George," was the only reply I could think of to avoid the usual jailhouse attorney's prolonged dissertation on the possibilities of freedom via pseudo-legal technicalities. Next to the slamming of cell doors there's nothing more painful to the ears of a yarbird than the moans and wails of a jailhouse writ writer.

"I got a guy I want you to meet, Billy. You know Larry Jennings?"

"I think so, George or I've heard of him—pretty good with the queer, I'm told. Is it the same guy?"

"Yeah, that's Larry. And he's good people."

It was less than a month before Larry and I were in the same cell with George Zakaras. The eight-man cell in A Cellhouse held the best-behaved convicts in the building—we were too busy laying plans for the future to break any jailhouse laws. The other five, hand-picked over the years by George, were, like Larry, "good people". Bobo Martelli and Ben Sill were two west coast bank robbers who spent their time debating how to overcome past errors that FBI agents had been quick to discover. Jose Garcia and Chico Estevan were laughing off twenty-year sentences for transporting heroin. Ed Sims, a Frisco bartender who had mixed his drinks with girls, had fallen under the Mann Act, was finishing up his nickel, still trying to live down the quaint nickname, "Pimp". Even the deputy warden once observed, "How did that crew ever get together in the same cell?"

Long after lights-out, Larry and I had whispered plans for this swindle—for more than nine years. Before prison gates closed behind us we knew every move and the risks involved. Larry came up with the idea:

"I think I've got the answer, Billy."

"You and the warden."

"No. I'm serious. This one will work."

"OK, brain, spell it out," I

whispered, leaning closer to Larry's bunk. It was midnight and talking in cells was a 'shot' if the screw made you on his rounds.

"We always fall when a pusher spills his guts. Let's do away with pushers. Make a bundle and push it ourselves in one big cleanup."

"You're dreaming, Larry. Go to sleep. You know how long you last trying to push queer. The first time a bill turns up, Uncle Whiskers turns on enough heat to give every pusher and counterfeiter in the country a sunburn at night without a star or moon in the sky."

"Listen to me, Bill. This is different. By the time there's any heat, we're long gone."

"I'm listening."

"I get out before you do. I'll get the shipment and paper together in the east and ship it to the Midwest. I'll buy it a piece here and a piece there and keep down any heat from suspicious suppliers who play ball with the Treasury people. When you get out we'll run off enough to lay at one shot and get out."

"You make it sound easy, Larry. Spell it out."

"Hundred dollar traveler's checks. Each one numbered consecutively, bound in the same folder like the real ones."

"Oh, hell, Larry, you're flipping your lid. That's the worst kind of heat. You show your face every time you cash one of them and anyway, how are you going to number them in sequence?"

"There won't be any heat and I've got the numbering problem solved. We don't cash them one at a time. We lay them by the book at the one place where books full are cashed at a time without the bat of an eyelash—at Las Vegas on a New Year's Eve. There won't be any heat until January 2nd and by that time we'll be gone. And we don't cash them. We buy hundred dollar chips. Want to hear more?"

I was wide awake by this time.
"Keep talking."

"We make our plates to cover a series of checks with a different number on each one. We each lay 5 G's in checks at one casino. From ten different spots on the strip or in town we walk away with a total of a hundred G's. We can use the same plates for each on the sequence of numbers in each book and they get so much traffic in those joints on New Year's Eve that they haven't time to be phoning around town checking with other casino cashiers."

From that night on, Larry and I spent nine years whispering through the nights, planning and plotting. We didn't hurry when we got out of Leavenworth and we waited a year before we contacted each other. We were known counterfeiters with long records and we knew the Treasury agents would put us to bed and get us up until such time as they felt satisfied we were out of the racket. I worked in a machine shop in L.A. and Larry

worked for a printer in St. Louis, carefully making reports to federal parole officers each month to eat up our Conditional Release time. We talked to each other on long distance each weekend and carried on the plotting.

"You got some broads lined up out there, Billy?"

"All set and ready to go. And I've picked two Hollywood businessmen who never go to Vegas and who spend every holiday on their yachts. How're the plates coming, Larry?"

"They're finished, Billy. I'm going to run the stuff this weekend."

In the worst way I wanted to fly to St. Louis and look at the results but Larry wouldn't hear of it.

"Hell, no. You'll see them when we're ready. They'll be letter perfect. You look after the set-up in L.A. and Vegas. I'm trusting you for that. You leave this end to me. I'll be out there just before Christmas. OK, Bill?"

"OK, Larry. Here's a pay phone number where you can get me next Saturday at three in the afternoon."

I gave him another pay telephone number. We were taking no chances and used different booths in different areas of each city every time we talked.

I passed up dozens of broads before I picked Jean and Grace to make like our wives for the Vegas weekend. Some were too young; others didn't look the part of prosperous businessmen's wives or did-

n't have the clothes; and others wanted to know too much. I hung around Hollywood bistros until bartenders thought I was a regular. If the Treasury people were on my tail they must have figured I'd turned lush. Larry came into town Christmas Eve..

"Merry Christmas, Bill," was his nonchalant greeting at the Pasadena bus stop. He hadn't even wanted me to meet him there, claiming a one-in-a-hundred chance of recognition by the law could blow the whole thing wide open. He didn't even bring the checks with him but had mailed them on addressed to a post office box I'd rented. We picked them up and drove out to a Laguna motel where we planned to spend the holiday with a couple chicks I'd passed up for the Vegas wife act but found ideal for the real thing on a lost weekend.

"Close those drapes and let's have a look at the stuff, Larry. I can't wait."

With the pride of a craftsman—legal or illegal—Larry unwrapped the Christmas-wrapped package and handed me a book without a comment. He knew his counterfeiting product would speak for itself. After a long and careful examination, I let out a long, quiet whistle:

"They're perfect, kid!"

And they were, from the black binding of the folders to the sequence of numbers in each book. I couldn't find a flaw.

"Careful and don't mix them up,

Bill. They're in sets—one set for each book but duplicated for each casino. Pack 'em back up. When we unwrap them again it will be at Vegas—ready for action."

We partied over the weekend and holiday at Laguna and concentrated on the broads and booze, setting aside the tension, planning and plotting of a decade which was to culminate in a week's time.

The week between Christmas and New Year's was a busy one—all work and no more partying. Trips to tailors for final fittings; shopping for the type of haberdashery and jewelry that would be worn by the Hollywood executives in whose names I had made reservations in Vegas; intercepting the confirmation of reservations which I knew would be mailed to the two bigshots; checking to make sure the two men and their wives were aboard their yachts and beyond reach of telephoned checking by careful Las Vegas hotelmen; and a couple dates with Grace and Jean to clue Larry up with them and keep them sold on the idea that we were a couple of professional gamblers interested in a gambling raid rather than a counterfeiting swindle on the Vegas strip. The week flew by.

"Come off Cloud 9, Bob, before the bubbly water takes your mind off the dice," laughed Larry through the sophisticated banter of the holiday crowds in the lounge. From then on, for the rest of the

night, we were Bob Morton and Ed Jarvis.

"Watch for my signal, Jean, and make with the 'come on, honey, let's go some place else,' when you see it. You with me?"

"I'm with you, dear, and good luck."

Little did she know the kind of luck we needed. We sauntered casually towards the cashier's cage. In our first move, we were blessed with luck. Drake, the assistant manager, was talking with some guests in front of one of the cages.

"Enjoying yourselves, Mr. Jarvis—Mr. Morton?"

His recognition registered with the alert cashier and paved our way.

"It's impossible to do otherwise, Drake. Your staff is on its collective toes. Good organization."

He beamed with the compliment.

"Can I help you?"

"We'll depend on Lady Luck for that, Drake. You might introduce us to your cashier," I suggested as I produced my folders of traveler's checks."

"Certainly, certainly—Johnson, will you look after Mr. Jarvis and Mr. Morton?"

His request was a combined order and an expression of "the sky's the limit" approval.

"What'll you have, gentlemen?"

"Hundred dollar chips, please," as I began to sign check after check.

I didn't even tear them out of the folders but pushed them through the wicket to the cashier as quick-

ly as I completed the signatures. Without taking his eyes off the checks, Johnson unhesitatingly tore them from the folders; rifled through the stack to tally it up and pushed me out fifty hundred dollar chips.

"Good luck, sir," he smiled in a business-like manner as he went through the same performance with "Mr. Jarvis."

Larry and I worked our way through the crowd towards a dice table and waited our turn to get into the action. Jean and Grace, at Larry's signal, came over and watched us win and lose a few chips—I actually made a few passes and picked up a couple thousand dollars while Larry blew a little. I wiped my forehead with my handkerchief.

"You boys can't have all the fun," laughed Jean, "come on, Bob, let's see some of the sights."

Grace chorused in and hung on Larry's arm like a loving and possessive wife, "Let's see some of the excitement, dear."

Larry and I reacted like typical husbands and went along with the "wives".

Back in the lounge our same table waited for us and the same waiter welcomed us back with the respect due guests whose credit cards demanded it. While he was repeating our order for champagne, we sent the girls to cash in the chips—at a different cashier's cage. They fitted in like veterans.

"This is a new mink for me," laughed Grace.

"I'll leave by the side door," quipped Jean.

Back in our suites, we made ready for another raid on another casino.

"Go powder your noses, girls, Bill and I have more preparations to make for more action at the tables," Larry instructed Jean and Grace. "We'll pick you up in a few minutes."

"Now the real test comes, Bill. We're walking into every joint on the strip cold turkey, with no friendly assistant manager to back our play. At these other places, we're only well dressed strangers. All we've got is our appearance, the broads and the traveler's checks. These other spots haven't checked out our credit and if they shy away from the traveler's checks we fall back on our credit cards to sell them on doing business."

"And no local references, Larry. We don't refer anybody to the Thunderbird. If Drake finds out we're laying this paper up and down the strip he'll start comparing notes—and those notes will be the numbers on queer checks. All set?"

"No. Wait 'til I get these bills in my money belt. If we get a rumble, there'll be no time to double back here and the five G's will be getaway dough."

"Before the night's over, there won't be room in that belt for the roll you'll have. I'm going to let

Jean carry mine as it piles up. She has a purse big enough to pack a cash register in."

"Never trust a broad, Bill."

"I'm trusting my eyes, Larry, and I'm not letting her out of my sight. Might be a good idea to keep your eye on Grace too. As the night goes on they may get ideas. Make sure they don't get in any conversations with housemen or any strangers. And no phone calls."

The four of us strolled down the strip among gay New Year's Eve crowds, heading for the Sands, our next stop. A crowded lobby and packed casino helped our act. We were just four more, among a milling mob of mink stoles and white shirt fronts and the hectic action at dice tables kept housemen, special deputies and cashiers from their usual observation.

We left the girls at the bar and elbowed our way to cashier's cages. The action was so heavy we had to wait in line. I took one line; Larry the next one, and we carried on a casual conversation to dispel suspicion of special duties and housemen standing around.

"Hundred dollar chips, please. Traveler's checks OK?"

"Yes sir." and the cashier pushed a ballpoint under the wicket. I used my own gold-plated pen and let him take it in, with the *R. C. Morton* signature along its barrel. Cuff links and Omega filled in the picture. He didn't ask for credentials and tore the checks from their

folders with only a flashing glance at their numbering sequence. He didn't even look up from under his green eye shade to wish me luck as I thanked him and looked for Larry.

"Any trouble?" he asked with his eyes.

"Let's see how our New Year's luck is, Ed." was my reassuring reply.

We didn't even wait to get our hands on the dice at this spot. After a few side bets against the house, we exchanged looks which said the heavy, action-hungry crowds were cover enough to get out without prolonging the act. We walked to the bar to pick up Jean and Grace.

"Still lucky, boys?"

My reply to Jean was in the form of instructions to cash in the chips. They hadn't even seen us at the tables and I realized they had been out of our sight. Watching them was an impossibility. The girls cashed in the chips and we moved out with the crowds.

"Let's go back to the Thunderbird for a few minutes. Something I want to check on," suggested Larry.

Back in the suite we ditched the girls again and talked over the new problem. So far there was no need to hurry or panic.

"You see it like I do, Bill?"

"The broads—the crowds?"

"Yeah."

Larry was right. We couldn't keep track of them in the thick, el-

bow-together New Year's Eve crowds in the casinos. And we couldn't let them out of sight.

"Can't take them to cashier's cages with us. At two more stops they'll know we're pushing paper. If they have larcency in their hearts, they'll want in. If not, they'll scare and blow the whistle."

Larry summed the problem up in these words and left it hanging in the air for my solution.

"Alright, we'll watch them. We go to the cages one at a time and one of us will stay with the girls. It slows the action but it's safe that way. Buy the idea?"

"It's the only way, Bill. Get the girls and meet me at the entrance. I'll pick up a U-Drive. And bring the rest of those checks. We don't get back here again 'til we're done."

At the Dunes we ran into the first stumbling block of the night—a cashier who backed away from the checks when he found out the amount involved. I went through with the play.

"You'll have to see the manager, sir. I can't even handle traveler's checks for that amount unless your credit is established here."

As I turned from the cage, a houseman approached me.

"Can I help you, sir?"

I knew a signal of some kind had been exchanged. It could be a polite pinch or a courtesy. I had to gamble simply because it was impossible to bolt.

"Yes, you might direct me to the

manager's office. I want to cash some traveler's checks."

He took me instead to an assistant manager's office, where he introduced me to either a credit manager or an assistant manager in charge of the casino.

"What can we do for you, Mr. Morton?"

"Sell me some chips so I can try my luck at your tables. Your cashier's policy doesn't include my traveler's checks," I replied as I brought out my folders and credit card container.

He examined the latter and was impressed.

"If you'll fill out this card, Mr. Morton, you won't have any problem the next time you visit us."

He handed me an application for credit at the Dunes which I happily filled out, wondering if the real Mr. Morton would appreciate the addition to his long list of credit cards if he ever received this one in his office mail.

"Go ahead and sign your checks, Mr. Morton and I'll take you back to the cashier. I'm sure you understand this sort of policy. Hope we haven't inconvenienced you."

"Not at all," I smiled as I looked up at him from my signing bee.

I thought I might as well pave the way for Larry and save him the momentary scare at the cage.

"If you have the time, Mr. Thorpe, I'd like you to meet the wife and another couple with me. Do you know Ed Jarvis, president

of Acme Productions? He and his wife are with us."

"No, I don't, Mr. Morton. But it will be a pleasure to meet them and Mrs. Morton."

I almost broke out laughing when I saw the look of alarm in Larry's eyes as we approached him and the girls at the bar.

"Jean, this is Mr. Thorpe, the assistant manager here. Mr. Thorpe—Ed Jarvis—and Mrs. Jarvis."

"It's always a pleasure to meet new friends from Hollywood," said Thorpe as he shook hands with Larry.

"Join us," Larry invited the assistant manager who by now was completely sold on our authenticity.

"Thanks, I must get back to the office. This, as you can see, is a busy night. Nice to have met you and a Happy New Year to you."

Before he could turn away, I set the stage for Larry, "Better go with Mr. Thorpe, Ed." and, turning to Thorpe. "Ed will need your assistance as I did. Think you can help him?"

"It will be a pleasure. Traveler's checks, Mr. Jarvis?"

Larry moved right along with the pitch and joined Thorpe, "I suppose, if we're to try our luck at your tables, I should trade some of them for chips. Be back in a minute, Grace."

I noted the girls were too busy with their own drinks and taking in the sights of the bar to grasp our

conversation and, with an arm around each of them I joined them at the bar.

"Night, Mr. Thorpe, and a Happy New Year to you! We'll wait here for you, Ed."

He exchanged greetings again with me and the girls as he walked away with Larry. So far, it really was a *Happy New Year's Eve*.

"Go ahead, Eddie. I'll stay here with the girls. Try your luck."

Larry walked towards one of the dice tables and I watched to see if a houseman or special deputy was tailing him. It was impossible, in the holiday crowd of the casino, to determine who was watching who so I gave him ten or fifteen minutes and sent Grace after him. They came back laughing. I looked at him with a questioning look.

"What gives?"

"I couldn't lose—made five straight passes!"

I took my turn and dropped a G note's worth of chips. Back at the bar once more, we sent the girls to cashing the chips, keeping an eye on them this time. We eased out through the crowd and strolled to the parking lot as if we were actually on a holiday.

With only minor variations it was the same performance until we hit the Inn. Grace and Jean were showing the effects of floating up and down the strip on champagne and were on the verge of becoming a hazard rather than a help in the act. I drew Larry aside.

"We better get some food into those broads—they're looped and carrying forty-five G's of our dough in those purses. What do you think, Larry?"

"Wanna knock it off and miss this one?"

From the tone of Larry's voice, I realized he too was feeling the effects of liquid refreshments.

"No. We eat and get back to work. This is the last stop. OK?"

"Let's go."

On the way in to the dining room, where we had to wait in line, we met—of all people we didn't want to meet—Drake from the Thunderbird.

"Travelling around, folks?"

"Hello, Drake," I smiled. "Yes, the girls want to do it up right. See you are too." He had a carrot-topped chick on his arm that would have been an asset to any floor show on the strip.

"It's a New Year's morning custom here, Mr. Morton. We make the rounds of the competition. I see Thorpe over there from the Dunes. I'll bring him over. Do you know him?"

Larry took over fast. Obviously he wasn't feeling his booze as much as I had thought he was. He knew, as I did, if Drake and Thorpe got together with us there'd be trouble of the kind we couldn't stand.

"Yes, we met him. But say, Drake, if the others will excuse us for a minute, can I speak to you. Something important."

"Of course, Mr. Jarvis," replied the always polite and ready-to-serve assistant manager from the Thunderbird. Excuse me for a minute, Bette," he smiled to the red head, "you're in good hands."

Larry had him by the arm, friendly-like, but I knew it wasn't a friendly move. I noted that Thorpe had gone into the restaurant through the reserved entrance and kept up a conversation with the three girls. I didn't know what Larry had in mind but hoped, whatever it was, it would be quiet. I saw him and Drake walk out the front door. At least he was making progress. We were just about to reach the head of the line into the restaurant when he came back.

"A change in plans, girls! We'll have to go back to the Thunderbird," Larry explained. "Drake asked me to give you a lift back, Bette. Said something urgent came up that he had to look after."

"The bum," was the only comment offered by the red head.

"A few beads of sweat on Larry's temples and a chalkiness in his complexion told me that both he and Drake had run into "something urgent". I couldn't ask questions in front of the girls and hurried the pace to the U-Drive.

We left Bette at a table in the lounge at the Thunderbird with a promise to join her and Drake in a few minutes. Back in the suite, Larry became all action.

"Get your bags, girls. No time to

change. We'll pick you up right away—we're pulling out." Larry closed the door between the suites.

"What happened?"

"Pack up while I get a bellhop. We have to get out of here—fast."

"I asked what happened, Larry," while I began throwing clothes into a bag.

Larry whirled to the other suite door and called at Grace and Jean.

"Heh, girls, bring that dough in here."

Whatever had happened, Larry had his wits about him. I'd forgotten the money in the girls' purses. They dumped it on the bed and I could detect a sobered and frightened look on their faces as they saw the pile of hundred and five hundred dollar notes piled on the bed. They too were wondering what had happened back at the Inn.

"Here you are, kids, a G note bonus for each of you. We're as good as our word."

"But, what . . . ?"

Before Grace could phrase her question, Larry cut her off.

"Get packed—the bellhop'll be here right away." and he shut the door behind them. I was sorting out the bills.

"Throw the dough in a bag, Bill."

"Clue me up, Larry. What happened back there with Drake?"

"What the hell do you think happened? I dumped him on the parking lot and pushed him under a car. Now will you make with the rush?"

I scooped the bills into a bag and finished packing, asking questions all the time.

"Do we still make it from McCarron Field?"

"No, Bill, we can't take a chance. If that car moves and they find Drake's body, the airport will be sewed tight. The plane doesn't leave for another hour and by that time there'll be more heat on the strip than on a hot stove lid."

"How do we get out? That red head will blow the whistle on us as soon as she hears something has happened to Drake."

"We drive."

"Larry, we'd never make the California line. It's a one road route to Barstow and they'll block it off. Come up with a better answer than that trip across the desert."

"Alright; Billy, I'll come up with one, but it's a helluva long shot and it means some fast moving for me and some fast acting for you."

Larry picked up a bottle of Ballentine's and took a long drink from the bottle. He had dropped his suave swindle act.

"Can you keep those three broads quiet for a half-hour or longer? Entertain them and stall until I can go over to the Inn and get that goddam body out of sight?"

He took another long swig as if he was fortifying himself for the body-moving job.

"Do I have an alternative? If you got the guts to go back to the Inn, I'll keep these three broads enter-

tained if I have to provide them with a barrel of champagne. Can you do it?"

"If I'm not back in half-an-hour, you'll know I couldn't. Keep those broads in line," Larry hurled the words at me as he pulled the door open and left.

"Jean—Grace—more last minute changes. Larry's gone back for a private game and wants us to wait for him and Drake in the lounge."

Jean wasn't buying it.

"Look, Bill, I'm getting scared. You sure this is just a gambling trip?"

"Like I said, baby—and no funny stuff," was the best reassurance I could come up with off the cuff.

Grace wasn't the worrying type.

"Who cares, Jeannie. We got paid. Let's get with the bubbly stuff. Makes a good breakfast."

"Come on girls, Bette will be waiting in the lounge."

But when we got to the lounge, the red head wasn't there and I began to get jittery. But when I thought of the jittery job Larry was carrying out, I calmed down. A new waiter was at our table and I asked him if the "young lady had left a message."

"I just came on duty, sir. I'll ask the head waiter. May I take your order first?"

"We want some champagne. For six. We're waiting for the rest of our party. But I would appreciate it if you'd ask the head waiter about the young lady who was here."

The head waiter himself came over in answer to some signal I couldn't detect from our waiter. He too was new with the shift.

"May I help you, sir?"

"Yes, a young lady was waiting for us here, and I wondered if she left a message."

"I'll check with the captain—he may have her message at his desk."

The never-go-to bed crowd had not thinned out and I turned back to Jean and Grace. They had sobered in the last half-hour and either fear or suspicion had given them a tense, strained appearance, unnatural in a holiday crowd. When the waiter poured the champagne, I proposed a toast for the night's good luck at the tables—and crossed my fingers hoping for good luck for just a few more hours.

Then, across the room, under a spot light, I saw a beautiful sight—the red head standing at a mike. She was getting ready to sing with a combo and waved gaily to us. Just as she waved, the head waiter arrived back with the news that there was no message. I gave him a saw-buck and explained who the missing "young girl" was and he joined in our laughter. Even Jean and Grace sensed a feeling of relief and joined in the laughter. Grace whispered in my ear,

"I hope Larry hurries back. I feel like having a real party now."

And Jean was getting warm and more than friendly, holding my hand beneath the table.

"Do we have to go back to L.A., dear?" she asked.

"Fraid so, honey," I smiled at her, and hoped to hell we'd get the chance to get back there and away from a swindle that had turned into murder.

By the time Larry got back, we were part of the pre-dawn celebration. He wasn't hurrying which made me feel our luck was lasting.

"Luck hold out?" I asked.

"Everything's cool, Bill," was his only reply as he sat down. Ready to go, girls?" asked Larry.

"Spoilsport," Jean and Grace chorused together, and Grace threw her arms around him.

"We wanna stay and live it up for a while, baby—les play a little—you boys had your lucky night—les have sumfun."

Larry grinned. "You people have been having a party."

I caught his look. "Let's go girls. Party's over." and I rose to help Jean from her chair. And right at that moment, the red head came back.

"Bring Mr. Drake back with you, Mr. Jarvis?"

"No, honey, I left him at the Inn. Have a goodbye drink with us. One for the road and the New Year."

Larry changed like a chameleon, and didn't want to leave the singer with any doubts that would bring any heat on us right away. We sat for another round and made like holidayers. Larry and I smiled and laughed—and sweated. I didn't

know right then how much time we had and Larry couldn't tell me.

We checked out and paid our bill with good currency, explaining to the Thunderbird cashier that there was no point in cluttering up charge accounts with the night's tab when we had pockets filled with good Thunderbird cash. It was the first honest statement we made all night and the girl laughed and congratulated us on our winnings.

I had a few minutes alone with Larry in the suite before leaving and learned of his "clean-up" job while I'd been keeping the girls happy.

"You get rid of him?" I asked.

"I did," was Larry's terse reply, "put him to bed."

"Put him where? I thought he was d . . ."

"Under a blanket of sand. He was."

"Any heat? Any rumble? Can we afford to take a chance at the field?"

"No. No. Yes. In that order to all three questions. I told you everything's cool—or cold—depending how you want to look at it," shot Larry, as he picked up the crock of Ballantine's again.

I'd known Larry for over ten years and it suddenly dawned on me that I had a pretty cool operator for a partner.

Grace and Jean were asleep on their feet as we boarded the plane at McCarron Field for L.A. They didn't wake up 'til we reached L.A.

and Larry and I spent the trip whispering about the next move. Getting rid of Drake meant abandoning former plans and some fast and drastic changes.

"Anybody see you move him?"

"I don't think so. If they did, I made like he was a drunk. Kept talking to him all time as I was pulling him into the car. But what the hell's the difference. He'll turn up missing and that red head will talk. He'll be tied to us in twenty-four hours; sooner if somebody kicks up that sand at the edge of town; and within forty-eight hours at the latest when those queer checks start to bounce. There's only one thing to do when we dump these broads at their apartment—move and keep moving." Larry closed his eyes and let his head drop back against the plane seat head rest.

"We'll be landing in a few minutes, Mr. Morton. Shall I wake the ladies?" asked the stewardess.

"I'll do it honey. Thanks." and I turned to the seat behind us to wake Jean and Grace.

"Happy New Year, kids," I laughed.

"Pass the aspirin," was Jean's only reply.

"Wise guy," quipped Grace.

I glanced anxiously around as we passed through the airport terminal building and I noticed Larry pacing up and down as we waited at the baggage area for our bags.

"For a couple big winners, you

two boys are not very lively," observed Jean while we walked to the cab stand.

"Just another night's work, honey," I yawned, and helped her into the cab. We wanted to make sure they got right back inside their apartment in North Hollywood and knew they'd sleep for a day and a night once we got them there.

"It was fun," were Jean's parting words.

"Call us and we'll do it again," were Grace's goodbye words.

"That, baby," I thought, "will never happen."

Larry and I changed cabs downtown and took another cab to my apartment. Inside we threw the bags in the center of the floor and slumped down in chesterfield chairs as the sun began to shine in.

"We did it, Larry."

"Yeah, wonder what the take was? Too bad we couldn't make that last hit at the Inn."

"Larry, Larry, if you hadn't moved fast back there, the take would have been a trip back to the bigtop or over to the Rock. You count it and I'll make some coffee. Then we pack and get out."

"I could sleep for a week, Bill. Throw me your keys."

I brought a pot of coffee from the kitchen and watched Larry sorting the bills.

"Take time out for some coffee?"

"Set it over there, Bill, this is stimulant enough for me."

Larry didn't even look up from

his counting. I kicked off my shoes; ripped off the black tie and settled down to suck up the hot, black coffee and watch him. His face was a study in strained concentration and his hands moved like a bank cashier's, snapping each bill as he counted the loot. It took him half an hour and in that time he didn't utter a word or a sound. I didn't disturb him. He made two separate piles on the bed and let out a long, series of peppy whistles.

"Fifty-two G's apiece!"

"You sure, Larry?"

"Damn right, I'm sure."

"You realize that means we picked up fourteen G's at the crap tables? If we'd gone in those joints on a shoestring trying to beat those tables, we'd come out tapped. We throw some hundred dollar chips around for a front, not caring if we win or lose and what happens? We win. What do you think about that?"

"I'm thinking about something else, Bill. If I'd any idea we were over the hundred G mark, I'd have bypassed the Dunes and we'd never have run into Drake. And I'd never had to dump the guy. Pour me some of that java."

"It's done, Larry—the little world that might have been. No point in thinking about it—or him—now."

"I know. We got other things to think about. Heat from a pile of counterfeit checks is one thing, even without a rumble. But the heat that's going to be turned on

for dumping that hotel man is something else. Good gawd almighty—think about it—the FBI for moving that queer across a state line and lamming after the caper; private law from that traveler's check corporation; the Las Vegas law; and all the law in the country that plays ball with them."

"You missed the real heat, Larry."

"Whatinhell did I miss that counts?" Larry asked with a derisive grin.

"The heat from the people behind the hotel association in Vegas. Those boys would hardly stand still for being slipped with the queer checks. They'll jump up and down when they learn one of their assistant managers got it in the process. And they'll tie us in with Drake's killing before tomorrow morning. The FBI will have it on teletype by tomorrow but the assorted mobs behind those casinos will have it on the grapevine before them. Get the picture, Larry?"

"I don't need a painting of it. Got any Benny? I don't see any sleep in the picture for another couple days."

We finished the New Year's morning breakfast—coffee, Benny and cigarettes—making new plans to lam. We had planned to head for Central America but knew now there'd be as much heat from the law there as anyplace else. We were both known to have lammed there before and the murder rap was on extradition treaties from Mexico

to Costa Rica—and points south.

"We get off the continent in forty-eight hours, Bill, or we're done. Right?"

I agreed. We tossed possibilities back and forth for half-an-hour and decided to head north to Vancouver and from there to the Orient.

"Larry, we've got to get out of this apartment. I don't think there's any heat on yet. But it's no damn time for guessing games. This will be the FBI's first stop if they start looking for a counterfeiter on the west coast." I looked down on the street as I talked but couldn't see anything suspicious.

"OK, Bill, pack—and pack light—and let's get the hell outta here."

We changed our clothes and took the elevator to the basement where my car was parked. We drove to Chico Estevan's place on La Jolla and parked in the alley.

"Bill, Larry—come on in. Long time no see. Siddown. I fix a drink. I know you don't want any Horse."

We gave him an opportunity to express his Latin emotions at the sight of two former members of the Leavenworth cell in which he'd flattened out a double sawbuck and then I cut him short.

"No drink; no fix, Chico. Business this morning."

"What you want, Billy?" The heroin smuggler knew the score well enough and could be all business when necessary.

"I've got a car in the alley that I want driven and parked at San

Ysidro to make like Larry and I've gone across to Tijuana. I want to be sure it gets there and gets parked—right away."

"Eees it hot, Billy?"

"No but it can damn soon be. No questions, Chico. There's a C note for getting it there by noon. You got anybody that's reliable?"

"Sure, and you know'm. Remember Jose?"

"Garcia? Is he around?"

"I get'm for you." he let go with a tornado of fast Spanish to his son who returned with Jose Garcia. We had to wait out another reunion speech from Jose.

"Billy and Larry got job for you, Jose. Drive heap to the border for a C note. You wanit?"

"For a C note I drive it to Guatemala and bring it back full of H. Where is it?"

I gave the keys to Jose and Larry handed him five twenties before I could pay him.

"Your car, my dough, Bill," was his only comment but I knew what was in Larry's mind. He didn't want me flashing any big bills. Chico and Jose were jailhouse friends—who would knife a friend for a tenth of what we were packing.

"You guys must be hot," quizzed Chico.

"No. Just that heap. See you around, kid."

We watched Jose pull out of the alley and left.

"Think he'll take it to the border, Bill?"

"Your guess is as good as mine. I think so. If he does, we get a break. If he doesn't, there's not a helluva lot we can do about it. The way I see it, we keep moving like the law's right behind us and don't take anything for granted, Larry. Still want to take a chance on the airport?"

"We want to get to Frisco before there's any heat. Georgie Zakaras is the only connection we know out here for papers and passports. We can't get off the continent without them. You think of a faster way to get to Frisco?"

Larry flagged down a cab and I left his question unanswered.

"Statler Hilton," I replied to the cabbie who didn't want to talk any more than we did. When he stopped for a light on Wilshire, he asked.

"Want to hear the eleven o'clock news?"

"Don't mind," I came back with, "it'll be the first news of the New Year." I could feel Larry stiffen.

"Crime, crime, nothing but crime. What a way to start off the New Year," observed the philosophical cabbie.

But the crimes we had committed last night and this morning were not on the news and we walked into the airline office in the Hilton like we had a license. Our luck was lasting, even if we were pushing it, and we got on a flight that put us down in San Francisco early in the afternoon.

"Don't sit next to me on the

plane, Bill. And when it lands in Frisco, don't walk with me or make like we're together. Keep me in sight. I'll take a cab to the Music Box on Geary Street and you can pick me up there or at the hotel across the street if you lose me. I got a hunch this is just the calm before a helluva storm for us. OK?"

"OK, Larry." and I slept all the way north until the stewardess woke me to fasten my seat belt for landing. Even the Benny couldn't overcome the demand for sleep. I caught Larry's eye as we were waiting to leave the plane but he only nodded his head imperceptibly and I followed him into the airport building. Cautious glances ahead didn't turn up any sign of law and I managed to get the cab behind Larry's as it pulled away safely into the traffic.

"The Music Box on Geary Street," I told the driver and kept my eye on Larry's cab to see if he was tailed. After a couple miles, I relaxed. So far no heat and we were getting farther from where the heat would start.

"Any news?" I asked Larry when I found him scanning a paper in the hotel lobby.

"The usual," was his casual reply. "Let's go."

"Same cab?"

"No. You know Georgie's address. Pick me up there." Larry walked through the lobby and out the door with the paper folded under his arm. I stopped at the news

stand for some cigarettes and noticed transistor radios in the showcase.

"Do those sets work on a plane or train?"

"Oh, yes, sir, they'll work anywhere. They're guaranteed."

I bought one, thinking, "I'll never be around to get my money back, baby, if it doesn't work."

I got out of the cab a block away from the address George had given me when he left Leavenworth.

"I own the house, Billy, and if I'm not there, my old lady can tell you where I'll be," were the instructions of George Zakaras when he left us at Leavenworth. He ran a sideline to his fence—letter-perfect, forged credentials and passports for the underworld.

I walked around the side of the brown frame house and knocked. The inside curtain moved and the door opened.

"All you guys use side doors today. Come on in, Billy."

George must have been up all night too and he was still celebrating.

"Happy New Year, kid. You look good," George bellowed with an arm around me.

"Larry here?"

"Yeah, he's upstairs, looking out the window for you. How come you sneak up the alley? Who you hiding from, Billy boy?"

I laughed and let him talk. I didn't know what Larry had told him and, as far as I was concerned,

the less told the better. Larry was stretched out on a chesterfield with a drink in his hand.

"Make it OK, Bill?"

"No trouble. You?"

"Just got here ahead of you, Bill."

"You guys on the run? What's the score?" asked George as he walked over to me with a drink.

Larry took it from there. "Sit down, Georgie, we've got business with you—paper business."

"Everybody's got business with Georgie. Today we party. It's been a long time and we were in that drum a long time together. We live it up today and tomorrow we talk business. You like that, Larry?"

"No, I don't like that, Georgie," and Larry reached over to turn down the blaring television.

George turned serious, "Trouble? Heat?"

I got in the picture, "Bad trouble. Bad heat, Georgie—"

"You guys drive up here on the lam. You're nuts. This house is the hottest spot this side of Mission Street. And if the law's looking for you where do you think they go? Your Uncle Whiskers' sheet pegs your old cell partners. If they even think you're in this town, they'll be here," George raved.

"So let's get the hell out of here, George, we still got business with you. You know this town. Take us to a spot where we can talk and not worry about the law moving in." Larry was on his feet talking chin-to-chin with Zakaras.

George moved like the house was on fire. His last words to his wife as we went out the side door were,

"I'm in Sausalito if anybody wants to know." He kept going, ignoring her shouting and questions.

He led us up one alley and down another and finally down a set of basement steps at the rear entrance of what could only be a jive joint from the noise above us. Three or four mid-day drinkers were at a dingy bar and the few couples at tables didn't look up through the fog of smoke as George pushed through to a locked door. He pulled out a key ring and fumbled for one of a dozen or so keys. Inside was a roll-top desk and a few chairs. He sat down at the desk and whirled around in the swivel chair.

"Alright, my lamster friends, spell it out. What do you want?" George was cold sober now—all business, if a little breathless from the eight-block ducking-and-dodging through the Frisco tenderloin.

"Two passports, birth certificates, Social Security cards, driver's licenses, a couple credit cards and anything else you can come up with to stand up under nosey questioning by strange bulls," Larry ran it down to him.

"And you want it on the fly," sneered George. "How come the big rush. What you running from, boys?"

"You don't want to know that, Georgie. How long will it take you

to come up with this paper?" I asked.

"How do I know? It means finding people and a lot of other things. Today's a holiday. You guys sure must be hot."

Larry was on his feet again. "Look, George, this is going to be a working day for you and whoever you need to come with what we need. Price doesn't mean a gawdam thing. Speed does. You with me?"

George's eyes narrowed. "Two grand from each of you and maybe I can come up with what you need by tonight."

"You got a deal—with an extra G note if you can make it before eight o'clock," Larry shot back at him.

"Boy oh boy, you bastards must be awful hot!" said George in a quiet voice. "Maybe too hot to handle?"

Larry counted out the bills and laid them on George's desk, "That'll take the heat off us as far as you're concerned, Georgie. Now get us some action—fast. You just got paid."

George looked at the banknotes; folded them and put them in his pocket. "You don't look so hot to me, boys."

And he gave us action, dialing number after number 'til he got all his connections together. He even brought in some broad with a camera for the passport shots. George played the host as well as the organizer, getting two steaks sent in

—our first meal in almost twenty-four hours. Larry slept in a straight-back chair and I kept my ear to the transistor set. Six o'clock and nothing on the air. So far nobody had tripped over that blanket of sand left by Larry on the outskirts of Vegas but I knew, by now, a helluva a hunt was going on around that town for Drake. By now that broad would have told the hotel people that we were the last people he was seen with. The heat had to come soon.

"Where you going? George got up to leave the office and Larry woke with a start as soon as the swivel chair creaked.

"Tell the bartender to bring it in," was Larry's curt comment. "Tell him to bring two—and some sandwiches."

George opened the door and called to the bartender, "Mike, bring in two crocks of Bourbon and send out for a dozen ham on ryes."

I kept my ear to the transistor and said nothing.

"Won't be long now, Larry," George broke the silence, "You sure must be sweating a bad one out."

"Like I said, George, you don't want to know," I broke in. I knew Larry wouldn't stand much pushing around and I wanted to see the phony credentials in our hands before curiosity got the best of George.

The bartender brought in the booze and sandwiches and laid an

evening paper on the desk. I read the headline, word for word, with George, "COUNTERFEITERS LINKED TO HOTELMAN'S SLAYING".

George's face turned to a sickly shade of white and he just stuttered as I grabbed the paper from him. Larry saw my move and jumped across the room. We read the news report in silence with George peering over our shoulders. I could feel his arm shaking. Some of the sub-heads jumped out to tell the story: Tied to slaying through singer—May Be in Mexico—Traced to Los Angeles.

"At least, Jose got that car to the border," was Larry's only comment.

"There's all your answers, Georgie," I grinned at the shaking fence and tossed the paper on to his desk. He grabbed it and spelled out the words through his bifocals.

"Maybe you'll get us some action now, Georgie," laughed Larry, "you know the rap for harboring?"

Zakaras grabbed the phone and dialed with a palsied hand.

"Benito, how long you going to be on those passports? You got the rest of the stuff ready? Get it over here fast."

"Half an hour and your papers'll be here," was George's only comment. He rubbed his face with his hands and poured a glass full of Bourbon.

"Do I know the rap for harboring? he asks me," George blurted out, talking to himself. "Do you guys

think your big heat—or mine—is from the law? Let me ask you a question, ‘Do you know what those casino people are doing right now?’ They’re turning their own kind of heat on you. They’ll track you down any place you go and nail you while the law’s sorting out tips from stool pigeons. They’ll gun you down so gawdamn fast you’ll think you’re a couple clay pigeons in a Mission Street shooting gallery. You got any idea who’s behind those casinos? What a pair of dumb bastards. Here, take this dough, I wouldn’t be caught dead with it—and that’s the only way I’d be if I was caught with it. Harboring? Hell, I’d do twenty-five on the Rock to get away from the mobsters who are on your tails right now.”

One thing about Larry. He didn’t shake. “Thanks for the refund, Georgie. I was wondering what I was going ta do with you after those papers showed. But I don’t have to do anything now. The paper did it for me. You’re so gawdamned scared that you wouldn’t admit having seen us if the reward was a cool million. Stay that way, Georgie, and don’t ever get any ideas. And keep the rest of your paper hustlers in mind—even if you have to dump them into the Bay one by one. Get the picture?” Larry was pouring himself a drink while speaking his piece to George and he didn’t even raise his voice.

George almost fell out of his chair when a quiet knock sounded

on the door, in spite of the fact that he knew the coded knocking. It was the papers and whoever brought them didn’t come in. George dumped them out of a brown manilla envelope on to the desk. We looked them over and examined them closely. For a hurry-up job it was good counterfeiting and forging and both Larry and I were qualified to judge both arts:

“You’ll never get to use them,” quivered George.

“We’ll try,” returned Larry.

“Sure you won’t take the dough for them?” I asked the shook-up fence and paper man.

“Billy, I wouldn’t handle any of that dough under any circumstances. Just do me one favor—forget you ever knew me. For the record, you never saw me after I left Leavenworth.” Georgie was really shook.

“Don’t worry about us, George. We never saw you. How the hell do we get out of here?” was the only farewell offered by Larry.

“Wait a minute, boys. I can get you out through the boiler room and up another set of stairs. I hope to God nobody in the bar recognized you.”

“Let’s go, George. Nobody can see through that smoke.” I wanted to get out and away from the scared jelly belly.

He led us through a dust-filled boiler room, along a slimy tunnel and up a set of stairs opening from another building across the alley.

He had a natural spot from which to operate his "business" but I wondered how he could stay in the racket with such a complete lack of guts when the going got rough.

"Just a minute 'til I look out," George cautioned before he moved aside to let us out the door. Then he pulled it back shut. "I wouldn't trade places with you guys for all the dough in Vegas. Now, don't forget—you never saw me. Get out and good luck—you poor suckers."

"See you in hell, Georgie," Larry quipped as we moved into the alley in a fine drizzle of rain. The alley air smelled good compared to the den we'd spent the afternoon in.

"Where to, Larry?" I asked as I pulled my coat collar up from the rain and Frisco night air.

"Out of this part of the town, quick—in separate cabs. You remember Ben Sill's address?"

I gave it to Larry and hoped my memory was correct. We were on our way to test the friendship of another former cell partner.

"Meet me there. We'll see if he scares as easily as Georgie. If I get a rumble, keep going. I'll do the same if I see a tail on you. OK?"

"We'll play it by ear, Larry and handle what we meet when we meet it. There's a cab. Flag it and I'll see you at Ben's place." He stepped out to stop the cab and I ducked back into a doorway.

It took me five or ten minutes to pick up another cab and the driver gave me a suspicious look, probably

as much from the pickup area and from my rainsoaked appearance as from anything else. But I wasn't taking any chances.

"Let me out at Turk and Eddy," I replied to his, "Where to, Mac?"

I switched cabs twice before I headed for Ben's place across the Bay Bridge. And when we got there I told the driver to pull on by. I walked in the opposite direction until I saw the cab disappear and then turned and walked back to Ben's house. No one was around in the suburban neighborhood so I walked right across the grass and looked in. Ben and Larry were sitting talking. I tapped at the window and saw Ben get up to go to the door. I also saw Larry pull his .38 from his coat pocket. I walked over to the porch and was met with laughter from Ben Sill.

"You tap on windows in this neighborhood and you'll fall on a Peeping Tom rap, Billy. Come on in."

Ben had heard the news reports and knew the score.

"I sort of figured you boys were south of the border by now. That's what the law figures according to the news flashes. Said your car was found at San Ysidro across from Tijuana."

Larry ran the car plant story down to Ben.

"Where do you go from here?" was Ben query after Larry finished telling of Jose's performance.

"We want to get north to Vancouver and then try to make it to Hong Kong," I explained, as if it was a wish for a weekend trip to a resort.

"What can I do to help?" Ben asked without any show of fright.

"You know the kind of heat we bring with us, Ben?" Larry asked.

"Hell, I'm hot myself. I live here with the wife under a phoney name and the neighbors think I'm a fruit buyer. I've been on the lam since a year after I sprung. I hung up my C.R. time and got a rumble from a score in St. Louis. Don't worry about me. But you want to get out of this part of the world. I've got an idea. Want to listen?"

"Keep talking, Ben, you're doing OK," Larry said.

"Rest up here tonight and tomorrow I'll drive you to Seattle, packed in a load of fruit. I've got the truck, the papers, and I make the occasional run with a load of fresh fruit up north whenever I want to move out myself. I can stand a stop on the highway and I know the route."

We tossed the idea back and forth 'til midnight and the more we talked about it the more I liked Ben's plan to plant us in a truck-load of tomatoes for the trip up to Seattle.

"We'll make it worth your while, Ben. You sure you know what you're getting into? What do you do if the law stops you and says, 'Unload.'?" asked Larry with more

than an academic interest in the possibility.

"I tell them to unload it themselves if they want to and duck when they get to you people. It's your party from then on and they'll be so gawdamn busy with you, they won't notice me shooting them in their backs. I've got some extra artillery you can pack in there with you and if a road block gets that suspicious—which I don't think they will—there'll be only one answer—spread tomatoes and law all over the highway. I can't stand a pinch any more than you can but somehow or other I got a feeling I can make it without that kind of trouble. I know the guys at the highway stations and they know my truck. Besides I'll pick up a legitimate shipment of tomatoes from a wholesaler and I'll have a good bill of lading. Want to give it a try?"

"Sounds OK to me. What do you think, Bill?"

"Come tomorrow morning we'll be just a couple 'hot tomatoes'. I'm for it," was my reply.

"Alright then, we'll try it. Now let's get some sleep. I'll load up at the market at three in the morning and come back over here to load you in. You look like you could use some sleep. Come on, I'll show you the shower and your bedroom. You can relax here." And Ben yawned as he began turning off lamps in the living room.

"Think he's on the level, Bill?"

Larry asked in a whisper when I came back from the shower. He was cleaning his .38 and his question was matter-of-fact rather than excited.

"He can't afford not to be," I yawned, "we're too hot to be fingered. Not even a stoolie would have the moxie to admit he put us up for the night and I don't think Ben's a rat." I looked over at Larry and saw he had fallen asleep before I finished my comment. His hand and .38 were under the pillow.

"I'll be back in an hour-and-a-half with my load," was Ben's three A.M. wake-up greeting. "Here's two BAR's and some shells. Check 'em over while I'm gone and make your own breakfast in the kitchen. The wife won't get up 'til daylight and she won't get curious when she hears you. Make yourselves at home. See you when I get back."

We checked over the automatic rifles and discovered Ben did indeed have some good artillery.

"Make some coffee, Bill and I'll clean these," was Larry's business-like reaction to the BAR's.

We heard Ben's truck pull in the yard and went to the back door. It was still dark.

"Gimme a hand to move some of these crates," Ben asked in a low voice. "Get some breakfast? You'll have a long trip. All day."

"We're OK, Ben," I replied and we moved out to help him. After two-thirds of the load was on the ground, Ben stopped.

"That's enough. I'll get some blankets and boards." Ben went into the house.

I looked at the van type truck and whispered to Larry, "Well there it is, kid. Once we're inside, it's up to Ben where we get out."

"Let's go in and get our stuff," was Larry's only comment. "We're part of the load now."

Before Ben moved the first truck-roof-high crate that was to separate us, by six rows of crates from the back, into place, he paused in his work, "Got everything?"

"We're all set, Ben. Like a double bunk in Leavenworth. Pack 'em in," Larry replied.

"Alright, now, listen—Don't panic when you feel the truck stop. I'll be stopping and starting all day. I may even have to open the back door for highway inspectors. Signals won't be worth a damn. You can't tell a horn signal from the real thing and there's no use of my trying to let you know in any way what goes on. If there is any trouble I won't get a chance to do any fancy tapping on the truck body. All I can say is 'come out blasting if any of these three crates in front of you are moved unless I tell you otherwise.' When I unload in Seattle tonight it will be close to midnight at a motel outside town. Don't start blasting then, OK?"

I looked over Ben's shoulder and saw the grey dawn, "OK, Ben. See you tonight in Seattle—I hope."

"All aboard!" quipped Larry.

We slept, tossed, bumped, cursed and jarred our way northward. For the first few hours, we tensed and listened at every stop. Black as a cell in the hole with the lights out at night and stuffy as a fruit market after a long weekend, the gawdamn truck van became almost unbearable. I never wanted to see or smell a tomato again before the trip was half over.

"This is one helluva ride," I groaned to Larry in the middle of the afternoon.

"You want to stop and catch a bus?" was Larry's only comment.

I knew the other kind of a ride available from our pursuers would make this van look like a Santa Fe chair car. I shut up and tried to sleep.

We had been stopped for the longest period of time so far when I heard the van door opening. Larry's hand clutched my arm like the claw of an eagle.

"Listen!" he hissed in my ear.

I heard a crate being pulled out and felt Larry slowly moving one of the BAR's along his side. I could feel my pulse throbbing at both temples. I thought, "Is this the end of our 'plush road'—a gun battle in a truckload of tomatoes with a bankroll that we haven't even had a chance to spend?"

"It checks with the bill of lading. Tomatoes. Want the rest of the crates out?"

"No. I think this one's OK. This is his regular run. Lock'er up and

put a seal on it or he'll be stopped at every roadblock between here and Portland to unload and load. These truckers got to make a living and he won't be able to do much with a load of bruised, over-ripe tomatoes." The voice sounded like law.

"Who you looking for, sergeant?" With these words Ben told us it was the law.

"Some tough guys, supposed to be heading this way. Don't pick up any hitchhikers or you'll just be delayed more at roadblocks farther on," replied the voice.

"I never do. Insurance company won't let me," Ben assured whoever was cautioning him.

"OK, Mr. Simpson, here's your papers. Pull out." We learned Ben's alias for the first time. And we learned that luck was still riding in those tomatoes with us.

The shock from that roadblock kept us wide awake for a long time and I realized I was soaked in perspiration in spite of the mountain cold. Long pulls in lower gears told me Ben was getting farther up—and farther away from the heat. Stops became fewer.

I picked up a news report on the transistor set that made the load of tomatoes seem to smell like a load of gardenias: "Las Vegas killers believed to be in Bay area. Notorious underworld fence found slain in alley—former cellmate of two counterfeiter-killers. All exits from San Francisco area sealed off. Arrest of

Los Angeles narcotic traffickers reveals planting of one suspect's car near Mexican border to be ruse." The truck was stopping and I had to turn the set off.

"I wonder who got Georgie?" Larry whispered in my ear. The truck had stopped and we both listened. It started again and I pressed my lips to Larry's ear.

"Whoever it was would have preferred to get us." Larry and I pressed our heads close to the transistor to get the tail end of the news.

"Two other former federal prison cellmates of suspects held for questioning—Bernard 'Bobo' Martelli of Los Angeles and Edward Sims of Oakland. . ." The damn truck was stopping again and I had to turn the transistor off. From the sounds of traffic I knew Ben was in a town.

"We're making a lot of heat wherever we go," I whispered to Larry.

"As Georgie said," he whispered back, "the FBI would peg everyone that was in that eight-man cell with us as soon as they figured us for the caper in Vegas. They're thorough. Maybe our best break so far is that Ben is already on the lam and they have lost track of him. We just got out of L.A. and Frisco in time."

"I think our best plan is to keep moving 'til it costs a dollar to send us a postcard," I remarked for a lack of something better to say.

"You know Vancouver, Bill?"

"I was up there three or four times before I fell."

"Think we can lay up there for a while?"

"Hell, no, Larry. We keep on moving until we're off the continent." I continued, telling Larry about the western Canadian seaport and the chances to get out. He fell asleep and I slept and woke fitfully in the few cramped positions possible between the crates. I watched the hands on my watch creep towards midnight and felt we should soon be getting near Seattle.

Ben made sure to let us know when it was the last stop. We were both wide awake and I could hear the sound of waves and surf. The fresh air from the sea was like pure oxygen after the day and half-a-night in the van full of tomatoes.

"We made it, boys. I'm unloading and we're in the clear," Ben's voice came through the crates."

Larry didn't take any chance on Ben being forced to put us off our guard. As Ben lifted the top crate in front of us to the van floor, Larry had his BAR at his head."

"Put that gawdamn thing down, Larry. We're OK," laughed Ben.

We rubbed our legs and arms to get the circulation back and limped out. We'd have been sitting ducks for any guns. Neither of us could walk for two or three minutes and it was longer before I could completely straighten up. And I could hardly see in the change from complete to semi-darkness.

"Where are we, Ben?" Larry asked.

"Behind a motel. I always stay here and the people know me. They're used to me unloading and shifting parts of loads. We're a few miles north of Seattle. I drove right through. Figured that seal on the back of the van should be used as long as it could. You hear the conversation at the roadblock the other side of Portland?"

"Every horrible word of it, Ben. It shook us," I replied.

"We got a real break there. The road block was at an inspection station and the regular inspector there remembered me and my truck. The driver ahead of me had to unload a whole load of cartons. I had visions of you boys staging another Alamo."

"Let's not press our luck and stand out here," cut in Larry.

"Help me load up. I'm going to deliver this load back in Seattle to keep the trip legitimate and get a receipt for it in case I run into questioning on the way back. You can lay up here in the cabin. I'll be back before the maid makes up the cabins in the morning and will tell her I want to sleep all day and not to bother with it. I'll get back as soon as I can—probably before daybreak. Keep the lights out. If you don't hear me pull in with the truck, I'll knock three times and then twice. And don't stick that BAR in my face, Larry—please. Makes me nervous."

"You carry that stuff inside, Larry, and I'll help Ben finish loading." Larry carried the bags and guns inside the cabin and I worked on with Ben, making as little noise as possible. The truck was well hidden by trees and bushes but the day in that van had left me nervous—and careful. Ben locked the back doors and got in the cab.

"See you, Billy."

"Later, Ben," and I turned to the cabin before he got his lights on.

We were used to the darkness by now, after the trip in the van, but the quietness of the ocean side motel soon put an end to our whispering. I fell asleep in a chair and Larry lay stretched on the bed. We both jumped at the same time when the sound of Ben's knock came at the door. It seemed like a few seconds instead of a few hours. Larry stood back with the BAR in his hand and I peeked through the slit in the curtains to make sure it was Ben before I opened the door for him. He had some papers, a bag of sandwiches and three large bottles of coffee. We talked to daylight without turning on the lights.

"Ben," Larry said in a low voice, "without you we'd both be in a Frisco alley. You read those papers yet?"

"I got a fast look at the first pages in town. You're hot," was Ben's noncommittal reply.

"You read about Georgie and the others?"

"Yes."

"You think there'll be any more heat on you?"

"No more than there's been for the last year. I head back to Frisco tonight and I never saw you. I might need the same kind of help someday myself, Larry. It's a small world." Ben yawned, "I need some shut eye. What's your next move, Larry?"

"First we want to square up with you. Billy and I talked it over while you were in town and we feel you got five G's coming. That sound alright, Ben?"

"Hell, yes. I'd do it for free. You know that, Larry."

"You know this dough may be hot as hell?"

"I know it. And I got a connection for hot dough—in the same town where you got it. I mail it there and lose only twenty cents on the dollar—no questions asked. The faster I get it there the better. Might even take some of the heat off you. I won't take any chances carrying it back to Frisco. I'll mail it from Tacoma."

"No," broke in Larry. "You may think your connection's solid as hell but this dough—if you send it back to Vegas—could kill him and you. And if you mail it from Tacoma, or this part of the country, you finger us. Mail it to yourself in Frisco. Make a trip to Mexico for a load of fruit and get rid of it there. You know any of those gambling joints at Rosarito Beach or Ensenada? Hit them on a Saturday

night with the L.A. crowd and you won't have any trouble. OK, Ben?"

"You're right, Larry."

Larry threw the bills on to the bed. "Wish it could be more, Ben. You earned it. But we may need all we got from here on in. Can we get out of here or should we lay up 'til you leave?"

"The people here are used to me sleeping late when I pull in at night. It will look more natural if you stay around and pull out with me late this afternoon—unless you think you should keep on the move." Ben was looking at the papers he had brought back as he spoke and it was obvious that he was becoming more and more aware of the kind of heat he shared.

"Can we get out the back way here, Ben, without passing the office down by the road?" Larry asked.

"Yes, you can cut through the woods and come out on the Bellingham road just over the hill—about a mile, I think."

"What about it, Bill?"

"Let's move out, Larry. The longer that we wait around, the more people are going to get acquainted with our mug shots that the FBI is pouring out by now. And as soon as they decide we're no longer in Frisco they'll send mug shots to papers. Let's keep moving while we can." I walked towards the window and pulled back the curtain. A fog was moving in from the ocean. "See that, Larry? Let's go."

"Better put those BAR's away, Ben. We can't lug them with us," was Larry's farewell observation to Ben Sill as we left the motel and cut into the woods. We came out at a bus stop on the road.

"I'm going to call a cab from that store over there, Bill, and go on alone to Bellingham. You wait for the bus and meet me there. I'll find the bus stop and wait there for you."

Larry was crossing the road before I could protest and when the door of the store closed behind him a bus pulled up. I boarded it, thinking he was right. The heat was probably directed at two men and any two men together would draw the attention of anyone who'd read the papers. I sat down on the left side of the bus so I could watch for a cab pulling by with Larry. I saw him pull by just before the bus reached Bellingham. He was sitting at a lunch counter drinking coffee when I walked in the waiting room. I went to a table over in the corner and ordered some coffee and eggs. No one paid any attention to either of us and I looked around the lunch room and then back at Larry. His clothes looked wrinkled and seedy, making me realize how I looked. I was looking, with interest, at a sign on the wall when I saw Larry walk to the wash room. I followed him.

"Seems cool."

"So far, Larry."

"How do we get across the border, Bill?"

"A little sign on the wall just told me, kid. It's a cinch!"

"You flipping your lid, Bill? What the hell you mean—'a little sign on the wall'?"

"We're going to a dance tonight."

"What the hell you talking about? You going stir bugs on me, Billy?"

"Wait a minute, Larry. Listen to me. There's some kind of a public dance at a golf club north of here and I remember that golf club. Its course sits right on the border—half in this country and half in Canada. It's only a couple miles from White Rock on the Canadian side. We take a cab to the golf club and ease into Canada on the fairways tonight. Today we stay apart here in town. Get a room in a hotel and I'll check in some place else. Buy some haberdashery and fresh clothes and we'll be just a couple more stags heading for the dance tonight. I'll get rid of my bag and you get rid of that brief case. We'll have to spread the dough around in our pockets or improvise a larger money belt some way or another. Two stags on the way to a golf club dance don't pack for the weekend. You buy the idea?"

"If you know what you're talking about, it couldn't be better. Sure you know that golf course?"

"I came across it a few years back with a couple Canadian lamsters who were trying to get into this country. No reason why we can't reverse the process."

"OK, Bill, we'll meet here at nine tonight. Be careful around town today. See you." I waited for a minute or two to let Larry get out and went back to my breakfast.

"Single, with bath, if you have one," I asked the room clerk.

He looked at my wrinkled clothes and asked, "How long will you be staying, sir?"

"Just for the day," while I was laying a double sawbuck on the desk so he could see I wasn't the bum I looked, I replied, "had some car trouble and want to get some fresh clothes and clean up."

He smiled with obvious relief as he gave me my receipt for the room and change for the twenty.

I ran into Larry three times during the day, once on my way into a haberdashery, coming out of a bar and, later in the afternoon, walking along the main street of Bellingham in new clothes—a sports coat and grey flannels—and wearing glasses. He had more gall than a man with gall stones—the last time I saw him, he had a blonde on his arm and was laughing with her.

"Hey, Mike, he called to me," and I had nothing else to do but to cross the street and greet him as nonchalantly as he hailed me.

"Mike Evans—Helen. Come on in and have a drink with us, Mike. Got you a date for the dance tonight, Mike—if you don't mind a blind one—friend of Helen's."

Larry had picked up the dame in

some bar and I could only go along with the play. It was an idea for a cover-up at that. I hoped he didn't have any other ideas about the two girls or about laying up here for the night. Playing with the key to my hotel room, I let Larry get a look at it to tip him off to where I was staying. I caught his nod and put it back in my pocket.

"We'll pick you up at the hotel around nine, Mike," Larry promised when I explained that I had some shopping to finish.

"What a cool bastard," I thought as I walked back to the hotel. I took a hot bath and went to bed, leaving a call for seven.

"Who is it?" I called to the knock at the door.

"Just me," came Larry's voice and I opened the door for him.

"Come on in, Casanova. No dame with you?"

"Like Grace and Jean, they're strictly for a front, Bill. Met the broad in a bar and the idea came to me between drinks."

"How do we get rid of them at the dance, Larry."

"We don't."

"Now who's flipping their lid? There'll be no partying at this stage of the game. . . ."

"Hold it, Billy. Gimme credit for some brains. These broads are our tickets right into Vancouver. They're both from Canada and are over here shopping. Helen lives on Haro Street in the west end and her girl friend lives just across the bor-

der in White Rock. And Betty, that's the one from White Rock, is our answer for the border—her old man is one of the Canadian Immigration officers on duty after midnight at the port of entry. Betty agreed to stay for the dance only on the condition that we would drive her home tonight in Helen's car. That 'condition,' Billy boy, is right up our alley."

"What a break!" and a whistle of joy was the only comment I could make.

"That's not all, kid. I told Helen we would drive her right into Vancouver and come back here in the morning. Feel like dancing now, Bill?"

"It couldn't be better if we had a police escort on both sides of the border, Larry. You're blessed with luck."

He had a bottle and poured a couple drinks while I was shaving.

"One problem, Bill. I never saw a dame yet that could dance all night and not learn a partner was packing a gun. What do we do with these pieces?" Larry was looking at his .38 while he was talking and mine was laying on the bed table.

"Can we leave 'em here in the room and make an excuse to come back here after the dance?" I asked.

"I feel naked without it. Another thing—how do we dance all night with every gawdamn pocket filled with bills. Those broads are going to be half juiced up and the first

time one of them snuggles up for some loving they're going to feel either the rod or pockets stuffed with bills." Larry posed a problem that had to be answered.

"Where do we pick 'em up?"

"At that lounge where we met this afternoon—in half-an-hour, Bill. Better come up with an answer."

"Your running this show, Larry, you come up with the answer."

"Gawdamnit, I sure hate to make a move without this piece and leaving it and my bankroll hidden in this hotel room is pushing our luck too far."

I agreed with Larry. The sight of the carton and wrapping paper from the haberdashery gave me an idea—and the answer. "Let's face it, Larry. We can't take off for the night with a couple of partying broads, packing a .38 and pockets filled with bills. We pack the rods and bills inside my soiled clothes; parcel them up in those cartons and check them downstairs at the desk; and pick them up again after the dance. OK?"

"What a pair of bright bastards—all the law and mobs in the country looking for us and we take off for a dance, leaving our guns and bankrolls wrapped up in dirty laundry. But what the hell else is there to do?" and Larry went along with my idea.

It was the longest three hours since the day I'd spent waiting for Larry to show from St. Louis with

the queer checks. I couldn't have got drunk if I tried and in spite of Betty's good looks and willingness to dance like she liked it I couldn't get interested. I kept thinking of one thing—that dough and those rods checked back at the hotel. But I went along with the party and played the role of a shy first date.

"Relax, Mikey. You're a good dancer but you dance like you expect the ceiling to fall on you."

"If she only knew!" I thought.

"Where did Helen and Terry go?" I asked Betty, almost forgetting for a moment the name Larry had adopted for the night.

"Probably in the car. Let's see," and Betty took my arm as we headed outside.

We found them necking in the back seat and I thought, "It's a damn good thing he did leave his bankroll and rod at the hotel." We killed the rest of the bottle and I looked at my watch.

"Time to go. You want to drive, Helen, or shall I?"

"We're busy, Mike. You drive." Helen replied from the back seat.

"We have to stop at the hotel, Betty, to leave word that we'll be gone for the night. Mind?"

"I'd even like to stop with you, Mikey, and she dropped her head on my shoulder as I pulled out the driveway and back to Bellingham."

What a perfect setup, Larry picked to get across the border, a couple of hot broads—to front for a couple of 'hot' lamsters, I thought.

"We'll be back in a second," I told the girls as Larry and I got out and went into the hotel.

The night clerk looked up sleepily from the desk and handed the parcel to me in exchange for the receipt tag. Larry and I pocketed the dough in the room and were back in the car before the girls got ideas of coming upstairs. We headed for the Canadian border.

I was surprised and happy to find a fairly heavy stream of traffic on the way to the border—partyers on their way back to Canada and shoppers on their way home. I'd noted quite a few British Columbia licences on cars parked at the golf club. My pulse quickened as we pulled up at the Canadian Immigration.

"Border, Terry." I warned Larry. Helen straightened her hair and Larry looked ahead.

I didn't know what to anticipate but hoped Betty's old man would be the Immigration officer who questioned us.

"Where's the ownership permit, Helen?" I asked

"In the glove compartment, Mikey, but you won't need it. We go back and forth all the time and they never bother local people."

I pulled up behind the car ahead and held Betty's warm hand—for luck rather than for passion. I didn't know what the hell to expect as I watched the blue uniformed officer walk over to my side of the car and stop.

"Time you were coming home, Bet," smiled the Immigration officer who was obviously Betty's father. Hello, Helen. You behaving tonight?"

"I always do, Dad!" she quipped to Betty's father.

"You vouch for these boys, Betty?" and before Betty could answer his casual, smiling question, he looked over at me, "You boys from Bellingham?"

"Seattle, I smiled back. We're driving Helen into Vancouver and coming back in the morning."

The Canada Customs officer was talking with Helen about the dance and his only question was directed to the girls, "You bringing in your contraband shopping?" Everyone laughed and we were waved on into Canada. The informality of the border crossing and the protection afforded by the two broads had afforded us a magic carpet out of the country. We couldn't have got a better break if we'd planned it, with control of all the planning, and we had walked into it accidentally, thanks to Larry's ability to pick up Helen in the bar and the lucky fate that sent the two broads shopping that day in Bellingham with an eye for some fun. I put my arm around Betty and relaxed for the first time that night.

"You'll have to show me the road, honey. I don't know White Rock."

"Turn left at the next service station, Mikey."

I could hear Larry and Helen laughing in the back seat. The guy was a constant source of amazement to me and I'd known him for over ten years—a wanted killer, partying in the back seat of a strange broad's car in a strange country, making like he didn't have a care in the world. I hoped that broad's hands didn't do too much wandering around his lanky frame and feel things she wasn't feeling for.

"That's my house," Betty warned as we neared a white frame illuminated with a street lamp in front of the lawn."

I kissed her goodnight with a fervor I really meant.

"When will you see me again, Mike?" she asked with what was probably the most sincerely felt question I'd had put to me in a long time?"

"The first time I'm back this way, honey," and I meant it even if I knew I'd never be back.

"Bad news, Helen. You'll have to drive," I said when I pulled up at the stop sign at the highway. "Hate to break up what looks like a real romance, kids, but I can't keep my eyes open. Hate to spend the night in one of your Canadian coolers for an accident." I looked at Larry and he got the message. He knew I had no Canadian driver's license and the name he had tagged on me for the night didn't match the forged California one Georgie had provided for me. He got in the

front seat with Helen and I curled up in the back not only to sleep but also to keep out of sight of any police cruiser that might give two men in a car with a girl curious looks on the aftermidnight streets and highways.

"Wake up, Mike." Larry was shaking me awake in front of Helen's apartment on Haro Street. I'd slept all the way through the city.

"Helen says there's a small hotel in the next block and she knows the manager," Larry explained while she was getting her packages out of the trunk. "Go down and register for both of us and wait for me in the lobby. I'll be there in a few minutes. I'll get Helen to phone from her apartment and explain that we're friends and that will take any suspicion away from us there. OK?"

I said goodnight to Helen and walked down the quiet westend street, taking my time for Helen to phone. I dropped a couple coins in a newspaper box at the corner and picked up a Vancouver Sun.

"Oh, you're one of Helen McTavish's friends," the night clerk smiled as he read my signature on the registration card at the hotel desk. "I have a nice double room for you and your friend."

I thanked him; explained that we would be leaving in the afternoon; and looked at some travel literature on a lobby table while I waited for Larry. The polite night clerk escorted us up the stairs to the sec-

ond floor room and wished us goodnight.

"Devil's luck, Bill!"

"Hope it lasts, Larry. We've been blessed."

"I was tempted to shack up with that broad for the night until I remembered what I had in my pockets," laughed Larry as he emptied them.

"You and your broads. Forget them for a while, Larry. We're still on the run. We're out of the States but not far enough yet." I was leafing through the paper while I talked in a low voice to Larry. I found what I was looking for but was happy to see it was only covered by a three inch, one column report buried in the back pages.

"They think we're still in Frisco, Larry. Look." I handed him the paper which contained a very brief press association coverage of our flight.

We fell asleep whispering plans for getting off the continent to each other.

The persistent ring of the 'phone brought both of us to life at the same time.

"You leave a call for us?" asked Larry as he reached for the 'phone.

"No."

"Hello," Larry smiled and winked at me. "Just tired, baby." He spoke aside to me, "It's Helen." They quipped back and forth for a while and I heard him tell her we couldn't make it for a breakfast reunion. "Sorry, Helen, we've got to

get back to Bellingham. I'll call you the next time I'm in town. Bye now."

"In case those broads pick up a paper and see us looking up from its pages at them, I want them to have the idea that we went back to the States. You got any ideas for today, Bill?"

"First, we'd better check out of here. It's too obvious—two of us checking in together. A routine check of hotels for two strangers together would finger us right away and there's a ready-made trail from the night clerk, to Helen, to Bellingham. I want to get down to the waterfront area today and see what I can find out about getting out of here on a ship. No use thinking of the airlines."

"You know the docks here, Bill?"

"No but I've been in the downtown area and remember a few bars—on Pender and Hastings. I'll try to spot some sailors off ships and make some inquiries."

"About what?"

"About signing on a ship or buying passage. Some of those Jap freighters carry a few passengers."

"Want me to come along, Bill?"

"I don't think so, Larry. Scout around on your own and see what you can pick up. The two of us together are what the law is looking for and the local police and Mounties have our pictures by now. Let's play it like we first did in L.A. and assume they're right be-

hind us—and they may damn well be. You check in one hotel and I'll find another. We better pick up some luggage too. Whadaya think?"

"You're right," and Larry started to leaf through the yellow section of the 'phone book. "Know any of these hotels?" he asked, pointing to the long list of advertisers.

"No, but pick a couple out on East Hastings. They're all small ones there and we'll start from there. We can't hang around this town too long anymore than we can hang around together. Find anything?"

"Here's a couple whose street numbers make them seem close together—the Victory and the Buckingham. Take your pick." He wrote down the names, addresses and 'phone numbers of the two hotels on two slips of paper and I reached for one.

"OK, Larry, I'll be at the Victory. From now on we use the names on our phoney passports. If you can't get me there, in case there are no vacancies, I'll leave a message. You do the same at the Buckingham. Better write it down." I looked at the forged passport, complete with forged visa stamps for half a dozen countries. "You know my name in this passport?"

"Martin, Joe Martin, isn't it?"

"Joseph, if you don't mind. We've had as many names as the original Joseph's coat had colors. What kind of a monicker did Georgie's forgers hang on you?"

"A pansy—'Horace J. Little'—what a handle!" laughed Larry. "You ready to get out of here?"

"I'll walk down to Robson Street and pick up a cab. Check in a couple hours to see if I'm at the Victory and we'll make a meet from there. Don't forget to get some luggage. See you, Larry."

I stopped on Granville Street and bought a bag and some clothes and took another cab to the small hotel. The desk clerk gave me only a casual onceover.

"How long will you be with us, Mr. Martin?"

"Three or four days, I'm waiting to pick up a ship," I explained—and truthfully—while I was signing the card. I paid in advance for three days and turned back to the clerk, "I expect a friend to call later. If I'm not in my room will you tell him to leave a number where I can reach him, please?"

"Yes, be glad to, Mr. Martin."

I changed and shaved. "No use dressing up in this part of the town," I thought, and walked down the stairs to the beverage room wearing a windbreaker over a sweater.

"Beer?" The waiter asked as he was already setting a glass on the table.

"Thanks," I replied, laying a small bill down. I noticed everyone else in the Victory's beverage room was drinking glass beer and wanted to fit in the picture. It was a quiet crowd of early drinkers and I

couldn't see any sign of seamen. I finished the beer and walked out the street door.

"Any message?" I asked the clerk.

"Yes, Mr. Martin," and he handed me a slip from the pigeon hole. It was from Larry with a 'phone number. I called him from a pay 'phone in the lobby.

"Buckingham Hotel, good morning." At least I knew he'd checked in.

"Mr. Little, please. Room 8."

"Hello," came Larry's voice—with the sound of laughter and clinking glasses in the background.

"Don't tell me, 'Mr. Little,' let me guess. You're partying?"

"How can you tell?" Larry laughed, "Come on up and join the party, kid—fast," he put in with a lowered voice.

I'd learned to expect anything from Larry by now and new damn well he wasn't partying for just the sake of a party. The Buckingham was only three blocks away and I hurried out and down the street. The door of his room was half open and the party was spreading into the hall and other rooms of the second rate hotel. The Buckingham was less pretentious than the Victory and was closer to a bucket of blood. In the room with Larry were eight or nine partying drinkers, either Aussies or Limeys from their slang.

"Meet my buddy, Joe Martin!" Larry shouted to the revellers.

Responses varied from shouts to handshakes and I had a drink in my hand before I could sit down. The partyers were in assorted stages of drunkenness—from beligerent arguments and re-fighting the war to ribald songs and I noticed Larry's room was only part of the brawl which was going on up and down the hall. He came over and sat on the arm of my chair.

"Crew of a ship."

"I didn't think they were part of a bible pounders' convention, 'Hal,' but how did you get mixed up with them?" I asked.

"It was going on when I checked in and I couldn't think of a better idea than to get mixed up in it. With this crew, we don't stand out. Mingling with these drunks makes us noticeable as part of a crew of drunken sailors. Alone, or together, we stand out for any copper that has our picture in his pocket. And we might even get a chance to ship out with them," Larry explained.

"What ship are they on? Where is it heading for? When does it sail?" I asked impatiently.

"Hell, I don't know. They may be off a barge for all I know. I haven't had time to find out anything yet."

A fight broke out in the far corner of the room and was as quickly stopped by the seamen. In a flat minute the fighters were laughing together and drinking out of the same bottle.

"Larry, we got to get this mob

the hell out of your room. Sooner or later they're going to start throwing furniture around and the management will be up with the law. We can't stand a pinch for even a drunken party. One of the seamen came over to us and threw his arm around Larry.

"We're going down to the pub, mates. The gawdamn management won't send up any more ale. Wanna come along?"

We finally got the drunks out of the room and Larry closed the door with a sigh behind him as we followed them downstairs. In the beverage room I picked a table with a group of the more conservative drinkers. Larry went to another table and we became just two more drunks in the crowd.

After two fights, half a dozen beer bottles smashed on the floor and an exchange of snarling arguments with waiters, the manager came in and declared himself, "Get out or I call the police!"

This threat started a real brawl and Larry and I got out with our tablemates while the police were coming in the far door.

"Let's get the hell out of here," I yelled to the three seamen and Larry. We left through a back door and didn't stop running for three blocks when I pulled up gasping at the beverage room entrance to the Victory.

"I'm staying here. Come on in and we'll see if the place is as rough as the Buckingham."

Larry and the other three followed me into the beverage room where the afternoon trade had filled the tables. We found one unoccupied in a far corner and continued the beer party without the brawling of the rest of the crew.

"What happens to those other guys?" Larry asked the oldest of our new friends from the waterfront.

"Depends on what sort of a brawl they get into with the local Bobbies. If it's just a drunk charge, the old man or the shore captain will bail them out. If it turns into a real Pier 6 brawl and they split any heads, they do some time and have to wait for another ship."

I caught Larry's look of interest and knew what was running through his mind. If any of these seamen missed their ship's sailing time, we might be able to ship in their place.

I wanted to talk it over with Larry but he had started a conversation with one of the seamen—who turned out to be a third officer—and wasn't paying any attention to me. They had their heads together and were getting together on something. Other crew members drifted in from the brawl at the Buckingham and were less noisy than before. Three of the seamen had gone to jail and two to a hospital.

"Got your passport, Joe?" Larry asked with his hand stretched across the table. I saw the third of-

ficer was already looking at Larry's "Mr. Little" passport. I gave it to Larry who handed it to the mate.

"Your papers are in order and you'd have no trouble landing but you have to get passage from the line's office. The skipper can't book passengers on the dockside. Why not go down to the office now and we can find out if you can sail with us?" The Australian seaman looked at his watch. "It closes at five."

"Let's go," Larry said.

The three of us left in a cab and the mate gave his line's office address to the driver. It was in an office building on Granville and the agent of the line ran it down to us.

"Your papers are alright, gentlemen, but you're American Citizens and you need Internal Revenue receipts from your consulate before I can sell you passage to Hong Kong. We do have cabin space aboard the Maricopa and it would be ideal for you to sail with a crew in which you have friends, but we have regulations which we have to observe meticulously. It's almost five now and I'm afraid the American Consulate will be closed before you could get to it. And the Maricopa sails tonight."

I thought to myself, "We sold the sharpest bunch of cashiers and hotelmen in the US on taking ninety G's worth of counterfeit checks, selling this ship's agent on selling us tickets should be easy."

"Mr. MacGregor, we haven't been in the States for two years.

We've been working on a construction job up north. The consulate couldn't provide us with Income Tax receipts if we asked for them. We've been paying our taxes here in Canada," I explained.

"Do you have receipts with you?"

"No, we hadn't planned on sailing right away until we ran into Walt Hagan off the Maricopa." Hagan, the third officer had explained to the agent that we were wartime friends. How Larry talked him into that tale over the afternoon's beer was something I wanted to ask him later.

The seaman came to our rescue, "It's closing time, Mr. MacGregor. Come on and we'll talk it over while we're having an appetizer before supper."

The agent seemed relieved to get out of his office, "Delighted, Walter."

He drove us to the bar in the Georgia and as I looked around I realized we were not dressed for our surroundings. Hagan was in uniform and the agent was in a business suit. Larry and I had on windbreakers and looked a little on the rough side among the cocktail hour trade. I knew we were conspicuous in the Georgia bar.

"Excuse us, Mr. MacGregor and Walt," I said as I nodded to Larry. I had noticed a haberdashery on the way into the Georgia and told Larry about it on our way through the lobby. "We better pick up a

couple jackets and shirts and ties if we're going to stay there and we've got to stay with MacGregor until we can induce him to come up with those tickets," I explained. When we returned we wore Harris Tweed jackets, shirts and ties which we had donned right in the store.

"Ah, you look like Vancouverites now," smiled the agent.

"Thank you, Mr. MacGregor," Larry replied, "that's the finest of compliments." Larry turned on his smoothie act while I kept the drinks coming 'til eight o'clock—three solid hours of rum and cokes.

By nine, MacGregor was ready to make out passage tickets and anything else required for boarding the Maricopa as bona fide passengers.

"For old friends we can always stretch a point," he said with an arm around each of us as we lurched into a cab outside the Georgia. I was glad he didn't want to drive. Back at his office we changed from rum to Scotch—after we had the tickets safely in our pockets and MacGregor had 'phoned the dock office. We left him asleep at his desk and piled into another cab with the mate to pick up our bags at the Buckingham and the Victory. Walt fell asleep in the cab.

"I paid him in the last of my old bills," Larry whispered. They won't bring any heat when he banks them tomorrow. Think there'll be

any trouble when he wakes up in the morning and realizes he sold those passages over an evening's drinking?"

"I don't think so," Larry. "He got paid and if he broke any company regulations he won't be in any position to do anything about it."

"I hope you're right, Billy. We'll be unable to do anything about it while on the Maricopa but we'll have one helluva reception when we go ashore in Hong Kong if the law learns we're aboard the Maricopa."

"Wake up, Walt. Heh! Wake up boy." We had to shake the mate awake at the dockside but he came to shaking his own head like a boxer coming out of a knockdown. He looked up at the bow of the black-hulled ocean freighter and spelled out MARICOPA.

"Wonder if the rest of the watch is back aboard?" was his only comment.

He introduced us to the captain and a steward escorted us to our cabin.

"I should probably thank you for getting him back aboard, Mr. Martin," the captain smiled.

"Oh he's not half-bad," I laughed and thought, "you don't realize how gawdamn bad your passengers are, skipper."

The voyage across the Pacific passed without event. We ate with the officers and acted the role we had passed off—or that Larry had originally passed off on the third

officer—that we were construction engineers for a company with a job in Hong Kong. Walt Hagan visited us between watches and laughed as he had to ask the events of our first meeting. He wasn't the suspicious type and the open-minded Aussie took us at face value. Larry and I had ample time to talk about plans for the future during the slow freighter's cross-Pacific voyage. After the first day out I couldn't pick up any more news from the States or Canada on the transistor set I'd bought in Frisco. I tired fiddling with it and threw it overboard.

Two days out of Hong Kong, Larry began to grow tense and restless. "I wonder what we'll run into when we go ashore, Bill?"

"If these passports and papers stand up we shouldn't have any trouble—providing the law didn't trace us to the Maricopa, Larry."

"That's a helluva provision, Bill."

"Right, but there's not a damn thing we can do about it now. We go ashore and play it by ear. I don't think there's any heat on us. I've watched the captain and the other officers pretty closely and their friendly attitude hasn't changed towards us. And I would have noticed a change in that third mate's attitude if any messages had been sent aboard. The ship's in touch with the shore all the time, I think. If we run into any trouble it will be after we clear the Immigration in Hong Kong."

"You think they've got us on the Interpol network yet, Bill?"

"It's a good bet but if we get ashore in Hong Kong, we cut down the odds against us, Larry." I tried to reassure him as he sat cleaning his .38 and studying it. Don't let the Interpol boogeyman get to you, Larry. It has no super cops of its own but simply provides a link-up between police forces of the world. It puts our descriptions out on a radio and teletype network and provides information about our records, modus operandi, and what we're wanted for. The Treasury Department's Office of Law Enforcement Coordination is its outlet back in the States and you know damn well the Treasury has a complete dossier on both of us."

"I think we get a break from just that, Billy."

"Why?" I asked and noticed that Larry had perked up just from listening to my amateur explanation of the Interpol.

"The Treasury agents have nailed both of us before and they know we used to lam south of the border. To their knowledge we've never been off the continent and they won't figure us for it this time."

"Hope you're right, Larry. Put that away," I said as I turned to the cabin door. "Come in." It was Walt Hagan, the third mate.

"Any plans for Hong Kong, boys?"

"We have to see our company

first," replied Larry. "You got the itch for a party again?"

The mate laughed, "No, I'll be on watch and we don't have much cargo to unload. But leave your address with our office ashore and I'll get in touch with you when we make port again. It's a great town for partying. How long do you expect to be in Hong Kong?" he asked.

"The job should last a year," replied Larry.

We talked for a while about Hong Kong and Walt told us of his home in Queensland. When the Aussie seaman left I felt sure no news had reached the Maricopa of our real identity.

We were up early and Larry and I were looking down on the junks and sampans of crowded Hong harbor when I saw the official-looking boat cruising towards the Maricopa and flying a Union Jack from its stern.

The steward relieved our fears, "'ere comes 'er Majesty's Customs and Immigration, sir."

We watched the officers go to the captain's cabin and I felt the sweat on the palms of my hands when the steward called us. I followed Larry into the cabin where the captain introduced us to the officials. The examination was brief and business like and before the questioning was over I realized there was no heat on us—from these officials. They were satisfied with our papers and I explained to the Cus-

toms' officer that our trunks were coming by air. He advised where we should claim them in Hong Kong and turned to his business with the captain.

"All the gawdamn worry and sweating for nothing," laughed Larry back in the cabin where we packed to go ashore.

We played the tourist traps at night and shopped in the afternoons for a week. Larry and I had our first argument at the end of the week.

"Why can't we move to a first class hotel? Did we work nine years setting up that caper and commit murder to get away only to live in this gawdamn hovel?" Larry snarled at me when I said "no" to moving. He had picked up some singer and wanted to impress her.

"If you think this is a hovel, let me take you to the border and show you some of the refugees from Commie China and then follow them to what they have to call 'home'. You move into a swank hotel and you'll be in jail in twenty-four hours. You think the heat's off us? You think we're in the clear? If you do, Larry, you're a damn fool—and I mean it."

"We're just another couple tourists here and you can get lost in a crowd in this city in a bat of an eyelash. You're losing your nerve, Billy."

A knock at the door stopped the argument. Larry walked to it and I stepped back behind a screen and

pulled out my .38, peeking through the crack to see who knocked at an apartment door when its owners were unknown.

"Excuse me, I am looking for a Mr. Little and a Mr. Martin—I am Chan Lee." It was a tall Cantonese, dressed well in a well tailored western suit.

"I work for Mr. Little," Larry said, "what do you want with him? You can leave a message."

"May I come in?" the Cantonese asked.

Larry opened the door and not only Lee came in but also two other Chinese.

"What the hell is this?" Larry shouted at the three intruders. The two behind Lee had guns in their hands, pointing at Larry. I waited.

"Sit down, Mr. Jennings. Nothing to get excited about. He pushed Larry into a chair and threw an FBI wanted circular on the table beside the chair.

"A small piece of paper which may interest you," the Cantonese smiled, pointing to the flyer. "Or did you think you'd been forgotten? That was a good haul you made in Las Vegas, Mr. Jennings. And where is your partner, Mr. Martin?"

"He's out," Larry answered.

"We can wait, Mr. Jennings. We don't have to hurry."

The Cantonese pulled a Beretta from his pocket and levelled it at Larry and without turning away told the other two Chinese to look

around. I had set up the silk screen to keep the breeze and noise from the open French window which faced a gallery-type balcony and I stepped back on it and pressed close to the wall. If one of the searchers stepped out on that balcony he'd die fast or I would drop three stories to the street below.

"Empty," was the report of the searchers when they looked into the bedrooms. One glanced casually behind the screen but didn't look out at me. I stepped back inside.

"What do you bastards want?" Larry growled at Chan Lee.

"Merely to help you and your friend. We're noted for our hospitality here, Mr. Jennings."

"Spell it out, you bastard," Larry barked at him and moved half out of his chair.

"Siddown," one of the Chinese growled back at Larry and smashed the side of his head with a blue automatic.

"Don't get rough with us, Mr. Jennings. We call the plays here."

I wanted to let fly at the Chinese who hit Larry but held back when I saw Lee's Beretta still pointing at Larry. Larry was holding a handkerchief against his head, sopping up the blood.

"Well, what the hell do you want?" Larry repeated.

"What's left of the ninety thousand dollars American you took from the casinos at Las Vegas. In return we offer you your freedom."

"In return you offer me and Bill

a grave in Hong Kong harbor or a cell in the prison," mocked Larry. "Let me put a bandage on my head," he asked.

That was my clue and when Lee stepped back I threw a shot at the nearest Chinese. Larry lurched at Lee and grabbed his gun arm. The Beretta went off sending a shot into the ceiling as Larry and Lee fell to the floor. I flattened out and got two slugs into the second Chinese before I had a chance to get to Larry who had a half Nelson on the Cantonese. While Larry held his head I pistol-whipped him to give him a taste of what his oriental hood had given Larry.

"That's enough," gasped Larry, "I want some information from this bastard." Lee sank to the floor. I looked back at the two Chinese gunmen and saw one reaching across the floor for his automatic. I brought my heel down on his wrist and heard the bones crack. Larry scooped up his gun and pocketed it. I frisked him and Lee while Larry went over the other body. They carried a total of six guns and three knives.

"They came prepared," Bill.

"Put a bandage on that cut on your head, Larry, and bring some adhesive tape back here for this bastard. I want him tied up when he comes to."

"Think those shots will bring anybody?" Larry asked while I was taping the Cantonese's wrists and legs.

"Hell no. You could fire off a cannon in this neighborhood and no one would hear it. And if anyone did, they mind their own business. I guess these people have troubles of their own," I replied. Lee groaned and strained against the tape.

"Now *we* call the plays, *Mr. Lee*," Larry growled.

"For a while," observed the cool Cantonese.

"How did you get a line on us?" Larry asked.

The oriental smile infuriated Larry and he kicked the side of the Chinaman's head tearing off part of his ear and knocking him out again.

"You won't get much information out of him that way, Larry," I told him.

"I'll kill the sunuvabich trying." He threw some water from the bathroom sink on Lee's face and started again as soon as he regained consciousness.

"Talk or die—slowly—Lee," was the matter-of-fact proposition Larry made to him. The Cantonese saw the light and started to talk.

"The Hong Kong police do not know you're here. I have a friend who gets me photostats of these wanted circulars and we have more eyes than the police. We find you. Shake you down," Lee explained to Larry, running down his unique extortion racket. His victims, illegally in Hong Kong could not go to the police when the Cantonese

shook them down—if he let them live to go anywhere.

"Who else knows about us in Hong Kong?" Larry asked.

Lee only smiled. "If I answer that one, you kill me. That is *my* protection, Mr. Jennings."

Larry slapped him across the mouth, "Talk or I'll kill you anyway," he snarled.

"You kill me, you never learn who follows you, Mr. Jennings."

Larry sent three quick shots into Lee's head. "At least you won't follow me, you bastard," was his only comment as he sat down on a couch and looked up at me. "He asked for it, Bill."

I agreed and didn't say a word.

"What now," Larry asked.

I couldn't resist my opportunity, "Maybe you still want to move into that swank hotel with your night club singer, boy?"

"Wise guy," he smiled.

"We've got only one move left, Larry. To Macao," I answered. "If those phoney visas got us by the Hong Kong Immigration they should get us into Macao. I checked at the Portuguese consulate the other day and my passport is OK, so your own should be too. What do we do with these bodies?"

"Leave them right where they are and head for Macao," Larry shrugged. "Pack up while I wash up and change clothes. My head feels like a morning after."

It was a superficial cut on his temple and a bandage would stop

the bleeding. I packed while Larry fixed his head and changed.

From the Hong Kong steamer I looked out at Macao and its whitewashed buildings which, cluttered on the hillsides, presented a disappointing view. Its appearance made me think of a small Mexican seaport rather than the mysterious Portuguese colony it was rumored to be among more well-travelled American thieves I'd met.

The narrow bay was crowded with junks and sampans and the streets were jammed with refugees.

"This town is more Chinese than Hong Kong," Larry observed as we walked along the twisting cobblestone street.

"You're criticizing your 'home town,' Larry. This is the end of the road—like it or not."

"It's sure not plush," was his only comment.

"Exchange it for what's waiting for us back in the States?" I asked. The boys picking up our bags stopped our down-at-the-mouth philosophizing.

We located a house away from

the harbor and the tourist traps—away from strangers and pursuers who we know are still pursuing us. But its red-tiled roof and surrounding whitewashed wall is a prison to both of us. Larry haunts the gambling halls and is kicking back loot from the Vegas casinos to the less plush ones in Macao. I've shacked up with a part Portuguese-part Chinese-part nymphomaniac whose charms flare up and die down in heroin nightmares. Larry hits the bottle and calls us a pair of hopheads.

"One of these nights I'll catch the ferry back to Hong Kong," is his intermittent threat. "I've had enough of this gawdamn place."

"One of these days, Larry, they'll catch up with us and we'll hold court on the cobblestones of Macao," is my usual reply. "I get tired too, looking over my shoulder but it's a watching, waiting game. We watch for the law and wait for the Mafia or some other American hood to come gunning. Like you said the day we landed here—it's sure not plush'."



EVERY GOOD GUY



GIVES THE UNITED WAY

YOUR

COMMUNITY

**...is a better place
for you and your family
because
you give
the United Way**



I READ the item in the Medicino *Road Runner*, which I take for old times' sake. It said Harry Marr's body was found Friday evening floating in the storage tank used for domestic water at the Goodfield ranch. Marr had been missing since repairing a leak in the tank. Supposedly he went off

In my letter to George, written that evening, I mentioned Marr and said it sounded like an odd way to die. George's reply came by return mail. It was mostly about Marr. He said there could be more to the case than met the eye. "Do you plan to come down soon?" he asked. From my laconic older broth-

There are times when The Law serves Justice best by closing its eyes.

THE GUILTY DEAD

BY
NEIL M. CLARK

afterwards in his pickup, but he was not seen again till his body was discovered by a ranch hand. Services were held Monday, burial was in the Medicino cemetery.

That was all. Medicino is my home town. I knew Marr, not well. The Goodfields are old friends. Though I left Medicino at nineteen to join the Marines, and later went into police work a thousand miles away, my brother George, who stayed, has been elected sheriff year after year, and I go back for visits when I can.

er, this was an urgent invitation to get there by the first plane. It had been a long time since my last visit. Luckily, it was possible just then for me to go.

I left the TWA plane at Albuquerque. Bill Cutter flew me the rest of the way in one of his two-seaters. George was waiting at the cow-pasture airport at Medicino, and we went right out to the Goodfield ranch. On the way he told me the facts as he knew them.

Cattle and the Goodfields have been synonymous in the Medicino

for three generations. The Valley is big country. In the middle of it you look ten to twenty miles on either hand, and see the ground sweeping up gradually to parallel mountain ranges. The sun rises behind one range and sets behind the other. The Valley is richly grassed. Most places you see no houses or buildings. Ranch headquarters are set back in protected spots on the sunset side, often near bluffs which break the force of winds that can blow up from Mexico for days on end. It's lonesome country: last time I drove through alone I went sixty-five miles without meeting a car. Yet you don't ever feel lost. I rode cow ponies there as a boy and loved it.

The Day outfit was small. Dad never had more than ten sections or two hundred wet cows. But we were accepted cow people, and knew everybody. The Goodfields were, and are, the big operators. They came early, and had what it takes to grow and last. They didn't hunt trouble, but handled it if it came. They were leaders in state and national cattle affairs, politics, and such things as cowboy camp meetings. They could fight or pray, and did both well. At the time of the Marr incident, the ranch comprised about a hundred and thirty sections, owned or leased, including some of the prettiest land in the state.

Chris Goodfield is about my age. He takes a lot of quiet pride in the

family's history and standing. Taciturn, he listens more than he talks, but when he says something, it carries a punch. Strangers sometimes think he rides a high saddle. Friends know better. He bossed roundup crews before he was twenty and made his orders stick with men twice his age, not just because he was a Goodfield, but because he knew the business at that age better than most men ever do.

Chris never got a name for hell-ing around, as some young fellows do, yet he didn't marry till he was in his thirties. Helen Harshman, the girl he married, is probably the reason why several fellows I know are bachelors. The Harshmans are a cattle family too. But they moved around. They were in the Staked Plains before oil and irrigation. They ranched in Nevada, near Deeth. And they were running cows in Arizona before Phoenix could speak English. They finally lighted on a good ranch in the lower end of the Medicino. Al Harshman had no sons, but his five daughters were the pick of the crop. Chris used to say when his wife was within hearing, that the Harshman girl he really wanted was Hannah, but some coyote from Beaver Creek beat him to her and he had to make do with what was left. It didn't rile Helen. She knew, as I did, that he liked the one he got and meant to keep her. She was nineteen, he was thirty-two, when they married.

Harry Marr came from lighter-weight stock. He was younger than me. He was a good cowhand, people said, but a chaser. He was good-looking; finicky about clothes; shaved every day, even on round-up; scraped a fiddle; was a square-dance caller. He rated higher with women than with men. He was the type to own a \$250 saddle and be all drawn up on his next month's pay. He was Chris Goodfield's top hand and foreman.

The private ranch road to the big house had a branch, which we took. George drove right up to the water tank where Marr's body had been found.

Drinking water at the Goodfield ranch is piped sweet, pure and cold from the famous Caballo spring, which was known to Indians and washed dusty throats of John Butterfield's stagecoach passengers. The tank is comparatively new. In my day, the only storage was the natural pool at the spring, a pretty spot in a tumble of black rocks, usually overflowing. George explained that when the new house was built, extra bathrooms and water-using appliances took so much water at certain times that the spring was dangerously drawn down. Chris put in the tank for storage. It stands a mile and a half from headquarters, a hundred feet higher, and about half-way to the spring. Cottonwoods screen it, and it can't be seen from the house.

George showed how the system

works. It operates by gravity flow, except for pressure tanks at the house. One pipe, from the spring, entered the tank four inches from the top. A second leads out from the bottom, taking water to the buildings. Intake and outlet pipes are provided with outside shutoff valves. George pointed out a bypass pipe which can, when desired, carry water to the houses without entering storage.

I noted that the tank is circular, made of sheet steel with riveted plates, and rated to hold ten thousand gallons. Vertical sides are ten feet high, the diameter a little over fifteen feet. A manhole gives admittance through the conical roof. Two short wooden ladders, painted white, chained and padlocked, were hanging on posts alongside.

"This," George laid a hand on one of the ladders which was eleven feet long and less than a foot wide, "is the one they use inside." It was made narrow so it could slip through the manhole.

"That's the one that should have been found inside," I commented.

George nodded grimly—"But wasn't."

"Wasn't."

"Proving murder. . . ."

I asked George to unlock the wider ladder so I could climb up and look in. I found the manhole cover a snug fit, requiring a tug to work it loose. As my eyes adjusted to the darkness inside, I saw the water surface three feet below

me, cool, green, lovely. A stream from the inlet pipe made the music of a tiny waterfall.

I tried to visualize the tragedy. I thought of the tank drained dry, as it had been, the upper valve closed to keep water out, Marr at work inside in semi-darkness, light coming only through the manhole. I imagined someone climbing the outside ladder, perhaps very carefully, seizing the narrow ladder where it rested against the manhole opening, and pulling it up. It wasn't heavy. A child could do it. Once it was removed, Marr was trapped. Was the act long planned? Was it a spur-of-the-moment opportunity, seen and seized? Could it have been a prank? George had explored the last possibility and dismissed it. I tried to put a face on the ladder-remover, but had no facts for it. I imagined the two people face to face, Marr looking up, probably startled, probably recognizing the other: the latter looking down, doing what? Would they talk? threaten? recriminate? I couldn't put words to a conversation. But I visualized the clamping-on of the manhole cover, and Marr left inside in black dark. He would certainly yell, curse, bang on the walls. But who would hear? I visualized horror dawning on him: he would hear the intake valve being opened and water coming in, while the outlet valve was closed to prevent its escape. Then would come the waiting.

What could he do? Not even a mouse could climb those slick walls. A shirt could be stuffed into the intake pipe to plug it, if it could be reached; but it was inches above a tall man's tiptoe reach, there was nothing to stand on, and Marr was short. How long would horror last?

George said the spring flow was a little over three gallons per minute. At that rate, we figured the water would deepen less than an inch per hour. With no outflow, the tank would take three days to fill. Could anyone survive long enough in 45-degree water to float within reach of the manhole cover, push it off and escape? I didn't think so.

"Suppose—" I started to say, but didn't finish, for just then Chris Goodfield rode up. We hadn't heard or seen him coming, indicating the tank's isolation.

His greeting was curt. "Saw you drive in."

George, just as curt, said, "Showing Ben the layout."

Chris gave me a "Hi—didn't know you were down."

"Just flew in," I said.

He seemed unchanged. Maybe heavier, but not from fat. Squint-lines around his eyes were grooved deeper. Five years had passed since I'd seen him. I remembered those powerful shoulders. And sitting in the saddle, he gave an easy impression of command. His left hand, with the bridle straps, rested on the saddlehorn, his right easily rolled a

cigarette. "You don't get back often," he said.

"They keep me busy."

His next remark was not a question. "George told you about our accident."

"I read it in the *Road Runner*."

He snapped his lighter and blew smoke. "Marr was a good cow-hand." Did I imagine a slight extra emphasis on the first syllable? "Staying a while?" he asked. "Not long," I said. "Come to the house for a meal," he said; "Helen would like to see you."

I said I'd sure like to see her too, if there was time. George gave no sign, so I let it ride at that. Chris lifted the bridle straps. "Come if you can. Let us know. Lock up the ladders when you leave, George."

George spoke. "Ample around, Chris?"

"Rube Latham—" there was no change of expression, but there was an edge to his voice. "Why?"

"Like to see him."

"You saw him Tuesday."

"Ben didn't."

His eyes moved from George to me, and back again. He nodded. "I'll tell him to wait at the bunkhouse. We're busy. Don't keep him." He rode off without another word.

George looked at me. I looked at him. Neither of us spoke.

Reuben Latham got his nickname when he heard the word "ample" somewhere, admired it, and used it till people got tired of

hearing it. Some said the "am" should be "sim." But Rube wasn't simple, by a rope's length; and he's a hard worker. He stutters badly if he is nervous, and the sheriff's second visit so soon after the first probably unsettled him, for he stuttered more than usual that day. We found him in what they call the bunkhouse saddle room, a common living room for hands and their families, big enough for a square dance, built when the new house was built, and furnished with saddle chairs, upholstered couches, books, magazines, a TV set. We found Ample watching the baseball game. "Them M-M-Mets!" he said, and snapped off the set. "L-l-long time no see," he added, offering me a gnarled paw.

George explained what we wanted. "I t-t-told you all I know," he said.

"Want Ben to hear it—"

Ample's story started with the coming of the tank. It had been a regular cattawampus, he said. Getting it around the railroad underpass; getting truck and trailer up where Chris wanted the tank set; unloading it. Everybody pitched in. When they had the tank almost in place, it slipped and came down kerplunk on a boulder. "W-w-wouldn't a mattered," Ample said, "if the d-d-damn tank 'd been welded. 'Twan't. 'Twaz riveted." They couldn't see any damage at the time. The leak didn't show up till the tank was nearly full. "Warn't

real bad," Ample said, "but Chris r-r-reckoned 'twould get so." He called up the builders and found out what to do to repair it. Ample and Marr did it.

First, he said, they drained the tank. They lugged up a five-gallon can of rock tar and built a cedar-wood fire to melt it. Marr climbed inside, while Ample lowered hot tar to him. "S-s-stunk like hell," Ample said. "L-like to made me puke. Harry l-l-like to smothered in the smoke." Marr spread hot tar along the seams, the idea being that it would harden as it cooled and stop all leaks. They were almost done, Ample said, when the Ketchum boy rode up from headquarters and yelled they were to come to the north Cerillos pasture. Cows were drifting through a broken fence, he said, and there'd be hell to pay if they got in the quicksand. Marr said he'd have to finish inside, but told Ample to go and he'd come as soon as he could in the pickup.

Ample left. He never saw Marr alive again.

"The ladder was inside when you left?"

"D-d-d-d-" I thought he'd bust, "damn tootin'!"

The Cerillos trouble was serious. Rustlers were suspected. A line rider found fence wires freshly cut and laid back. Many cows had drifted or been driven into the field, from which they were ordinarily kept out because of the

quicksandy Rio Pico which meandered through it. A disused road up to the old Muldoon silver mine passed this field, and it would have been easy after dark to run a truck or two in, load cows, and have them across the state line before breakfast. The hands summoned by Chris got the cattle out and fixed the fence, but it took the rest of the day. Two boys with rifles were left on guard overnight.

"Chris was there all the time?" I asked.

"Y-yes; n-no; lemme think." Chris, Ample said, got the gang out from headquarters, and was there himself. "He r-r-rode back with us when we were through. I g-g-guess he was there, all the time."

Marr didn't show up. His absence was commented on, but it wasn't till morning, when it was found he hadn't slept in his bed, that questions were asked. Somebody said his pickup was gone. Lute Graves, who was cleaning windows in the big house that afternoon, said she had noticed him drive off in it the day before. Somebody said maybe he had left for another toot: these were of a special kind, and unpleasantly frequent. His absence wasn't considered too serious till evening of the next day when he still wasn't back. Somebody called the sheriff's office and asked George if Marr had been seen in town. When his pickup was found abandoned and partly

hidden among salt cedars along the Muldoon road next day, it seemed clear something had happened to him. But what? Quicksand was thought of. But he wouldn't have been afoot, and his favorite horse was in the bunch.

Ample found him. He went up after supper to check their work at the tank. Fifty hours had passed. He said he pounded on the tank and it sounded full. He walked around and saw no sign of a leak. The tar, he guessed, had done the trick. Both ladders were lying on the ground.

"Not locked up?"

"N-n-no."

Ample climbed up and looked in the manhole as I had done, to see how much water had accumulated. The body was there, floating head down. "Scared me," he said, "worse 'n hoo-hoo-hoot owl in a graveyard."

That was the story. There was no reason for doubting it. We got up to go, and I asked about his folks.

"Pa died, you know." Yes, I said, I knew. "Ma's some poorly, but gets around good. Comes out here once a month to see her friend L-Lute Graves."

"Lute—that's Lorrie's wife."

"Widow. L-Lorrie got throwed and drug, and it killed him."

"I didn't know."

"Lute lives here. Chris lets her have the owl cabin."

"The one near the bluff, under the water tank?"

Ample nodded. "K-kind of lonesome. Lute likes it. Ma visited Lute the day we fixed the tank. Walked up and spoke to me—" He broke off. His eyes met mine, straight. "Ben," he said, "I wish you'd stop and see Ma. You too, George." I supposed he meant a courtesy call. But it was odd. The Lathams meant nothing special to me. I said I didn't have much time, but asked him to remember me to his mother. This didn't satisfy him. "If you anyways can," he insisted, "stop at the house."

It was odd. I knew what others have always known about the Lathams. Drouthed out in Oklahoma in Dust Bowl days. Heading West. Going hungry before they reached Medicino. Chris Goodfield being in the store when Ike Latham drove up and tried to trade a patched tire for groceries and gas, and stepping in to offer help. Soon the family was living in a house he owned at the edge of town. Ike was a good carpenter, with a comical way of talking, and people liked him. He got work, supported his family, was respected. Zillah, the girl, who was older than Reuben, left Medicino and I knew nothing about her. Rube had worked for Chris ever since he was big enough to catch a calf.

Since everybody had been questioned by George, there was no use covering the ground again. Nobody seemed to know anything except Lute Graves, who had seen Marr's pickup leave. After the body

was found, George questioned her carefully. She said Helen had asked her to wash windows that afternoon. She wasn't going to, because she was expecting Mrs. Latham. But Ma told her to go ahead, said she'd take a nap; so Lute did. She worried about leaving Ma Latham two or three hours, she said, and was hurrying home when she saw Marr's pickup leaving. It was some ways off, on the branch road. Yes, somebody else could have been at the wheel. She thought it was Marr. . . .

We were climbing into George's old Chevvy when a sleek Thunderbird purred up and Helen Goodfield jumped out. Memories flashed. I was amazed. After five years, she looked no older. She always had a quality of apparently tireless vitality, riding, roping, doing rough work almost like a man. But why, I asked myself, shouldn't the years have put some mark on her? They didn't seem to have done so. "Are you sure," I said, squeezing her hand and half minded to squeeze her, "you aren't your own daughter?"

She laughed and said she'd heard Blarney Day was in town. I asked about the twins. "I've just seen them," she said. "They're in school in Albuquerque." I figured they must be fourteen now. "Close," she said—"fifteen."

"It's not possible!"

Those two young ones, I thought, were a fine pair, well fit-

ted to carry on Goodfield traditions. Evans, the boy, quiet and self-reliant, was a copy of Chris. Karen promised to rival Al Harshman's five in looks and charm. "I'll bet boys are falling out of trees for her already," I said.

She sobered. "We've had—signs."

If there was a shadow, it passed. She hadn't seen Chris since getting back, but echoed his invitation for dinner. I glanced at George. He nodded. "Day after tomorrow?" I asked. "Fine!" she said. When we were driving away, it was hard to keep my mind off her. Lovely woman. Mother of a lovely daughter. Thinking of Marr's reputation, I wondered how close to home an outlaw wolf hunts. . . .

Putting my mind on the case, trying to fit times, places, people and events into a mosaic, I realized how little George had to go on. There was no sense in thinking Marr hadn't been helped to die. That narrow ladder hadn't pulled itself out. The manhole cover hadn't put itself back. Marr's pickup hadn't driven itself to the Muldoon road. Fingerprints at some stage might have shown something, but it was too late now. The person who meant Marr should not leave the tank alive, had not left traces. "Ample?" I mumbled. George said nothing. I sensed rejection. "A stranger?" None had been seen in the Valley, and strangers there are seen. "Chris?" George's eyes stayed steadily on the road. I couldn't

think of a good enough motive. A fourth name came to mind, but I instantly dismissed it: Helen often took rides alone. I told myself there was nothing that added up to a case against anyone.

George headed for town. As we topped the last rise, the familiar freckles on the landscape that are Medicino's scattered houses and stores, lay below us. The nearest, standing where the highway crosses the railway spur to the cattle pens, is the house I knew as the Lathams'. I was reminded of Ample's curious insistence about his mother.

"It'll only take a minute," I said. George nodded and turned in. I was first out of the car, and knocked at the door. A very pretty girl gave me a friendly "Hi!" I had no idea who she was. "Miss," I said, "I guess I don't know you, or you me. I'm Ben Day, George's brother."

"Oh, hello!"

"We've been seeing Ample—Reuben. He wanted us to stop and see Ma—Mrs. Latham."

"Come in!" she swung the door open. "I'm Agnes Walker. I'll tell Grams you're here."

She went into the next room, closing the door behind her. "Grams?" I shot the query at George.

"Zillah's girl."

"I didn't know—"

"Folks didn't."

She came back. Mrs. Latham had

been resting, she said, but was up now and would be fixed to see us soon. "She isn't very well, you know."

I looked at her and smiled. "Miss," I said, "George told me who you are. I remember your mother. Is she here too?"

Her eyes misted. "She—died three months ago."

I felt like the bull that broke the dishes. "I'm sorry," I said. "Sorry to hear it; sorry I asked. I didn't know."

She managed a nice smile. "It's—all right."

A deep voice spoke from the next room, bringing back what I remembered best about Ma Latham. She always sounded like a man and a preacher. "There's Grams," Agnes said; "please go in."

Mary Latham was unsmiling and old. Illness, sorrow, years or whatever, had printed deep lines in her face. She didn't get up from her rocking chair. "George Day," she boomed, "how are you! It's many a day since you came to see me."

"'Fraid so, ma'am."

"Ben too. The good-looking Day boy. The policeman."

She sounded serious. I grinned. "Thanks for the good looks, Mrs. Latham. Always needed some. As for policeman—"

"Reckon that's what's brought you." It was not a question.

"Why, Mrs. Latham," I said, "George catches the bad ones down here."

"Hmph! two dogs'll tree a cat better 'n one any time. You saw Reuben—"

"Yes, ma'am."

Her lips were a thin line. "Some things," she said, "Reuben knows. Some—" She didn't finish. I had forgotten how strange she was. She made me think of some old dark prophetess. "Where is that girl?" she asked suddenly. "I told her to go to the garden. Did she?"

I looked and saw Agnes Walker picking beans. "She's pretty as a painting, ma'am."

The old lady was not pleased. "Times," she said, "being pretty is God's curse. Ben Day, and you, George, I am bid to tell you that when I heard about that man—" she was staring unseeingly out of the window.

"Man, ma'am?"

"*Marr!*" She said it like spitting. "When I heard he was really gone, I knelt by that bed and thanked God." Her head moved slowly from side to side. "A foul, foul soul. May he burn in hell!" I have seldom heard more venom in a voice. "Am I his judge? Not I. God guided the hand that made him die."

"Whose hand?" I hadn't exactly meant to ask it, but I did. Her somber eyes turned on me, but she said nothing. When her eyes finally dropped, she asked again if Agnes was still in the garden. I said she was. "I would hope," Ma went on, "for her to miss some of the bitter her mother had. If justice

is not mocked, she may." Stony eyes met mine. "God's justice. . . . You know, Ben Day, and George Day, that her happiness lies with you."

I was astounded, knowing nothing of the sort, and said so. For a long time Ma' Latham was silent, and the only sound in the room was the slow creak of her chair as she rocked. "Maybe you don't," she said at last, "but," fiercely, "you shall! I spoke once. God acted. If I speak again—" She rocked slowly, slowly.

"We," I said rather feebly, "are policemen."

"But not fools!" The words came fast. "My daughter Zillah, Zillah and Marr, were the same age, come a month or two. We got here from Oklahoma poor as bats. Chris Goodfield was God's arm to help us make a life here: Chris, and the angel he married." Her eyes burned. "The devil was here too, in fancy boots, with turquoise on his wrists and belt. You knew Zillah. She was brought up godly. Never fluffy pretty like the one out there, but a girl a good man could wish for a wife. We took pride in her, Ike and me." Her head moved slowly up and down. "Pride comes at a price. We paid it. I excuse nobody: us, her. She—was tempted. And Marr wanted no wife. When she knew a child was coming, she begged him to marry. He laughed. My friends, he laughed! 'If I married all of 'em that have my brats,' he said—"

The somber voice paused. Her eyes closed. Fingers tightened on the arm of her chair. "Zillah went away. People here didn't know. Chris, Helen, you—nobody knew. She took my folks' name, said she was a widow. Told a story about her 'husband.' She was believed. She brought up the child God-fearing and good. Now, God help us, Zillah is dead. The child is prettier than the mother. Is there no end to the evil of evil men? Marr didn't connect Agnes with Zillah. Maybe it wouldn't have mattered if he had. I knew what he was after. Could I warn her? Could I tell the secret her mother had kept? Can anyone warn the young? I needn't write it out for you. As God is in this room, if Marr had lived, he would have had his own daughter. . . ."

The silence lasted. "Mrs. Latham," I said finally, "who pulled that ladder out of the tank?"

"God knows, Ben Day."

"You?"

"God knows." She had no other answer for us.

I had to question Chris. George said somebody must, and it might be best if I did. I saw him in town next day and kept it casual. "Chris," I said, "do you have any idea what happened to Marr?"

"Naturally."

"What?"

"Somebody figured he had lived long enough."

"Any idea who?"

"Not to mention."

"Ma Latham was there." He turned a cold eye on me. "So were you. It could have been her—or you."

His eyes met mine straight. "Are you saying it was?"

"No."

"You're asking?"

"Reckon so."

"I'm answering. If you've got proof, prove it!" He turned away. That's all I got.

George and I saw Ash Fenwick. Asher—nobody ever called him by his full first name twice—was a schoolmate and pal of mine. He studied law on the coat-tails of a judge who knew more about rye whiskey than the statutes as written, but he did all right anyhow. There isn't a smarter lawyer in ten counties. Ash has been Medicino county's prosecutor almost as long as George has been sheriff. Ashes littered his vest. He listened thoughtfully while George told a good share of what we knew. Two names had to be spoken. When we were through, Ash sat staring out of the fly-specked window.

"George," he said at last, "if you make a charge, one way or t'other, I'll prosecute. Have to. The evidence is circumstantial. Nobody saw anything. Could be right, or—. You kind of suggest cahoots, don't you? One to do one thing, one another. . . ."

George shrugged.

"Say we prosecute. You know

what happens. Hell of a stink. Costs the county a year's taxes. Latham family skeletons are dug up. Agenes Walker is tagged a bastard. Two nice kids are branded because somebody is their dad. Who benefits? Justice? Hah! No jury in the Valley would leave the box to say 'Guilty!' But it's your baby."

I had been invited down, after a fashion, to lend a hand. But when it came to a decision, George didn't need me. "Ash," he said, "if anything real convincing turns up, we'll let you know. . . ."

Dinner with Chris and Helen was a meal I'll not forget. Their ranch house is big, new and sort of splendid, sitting low under huge cottonwoods, with a wide, well-shorn lawn sloping to a swimming pool, the kind of home some of our

cattlemen like to make in remote spots. Nothing was said about the investigation. I marveled again at Helen. In front of her husband I asked how anyone so old and feeble as Chris could keep her all to himself.

"Guess I'm a one-man woman, Ben," she said, with a smile for me and a very different one for him. "We're range folks," she said; "codes—"

Marr's name came up just once. Chris said, "If Harry did anything bad, he had time to think it over." Helen's chair was close to his. I saw their hands touch. Codes. . . .

Marr died by drowning. We know somebody helped. We don't know who removed the ladder. We don't know who moved the pick-up. And we can't care too much.



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